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Another EVEREADY CONTEST $10,000 00 in Cash Prizes

List of Prizes

1 First Prize	$3000
1 Second Prize	1000
3 prizes, each	500
4 prizes, each	250
5 prizes, each	200
10 prizes, each	100
10 prizes, each	50
20 prizes, each	25
50 prizes, each	10

$3,000 for 12 Words

WHEN Sir A. Conan Doyle was paid a dollar a word he set a record in the history of writing. You may earn *$250 a word* in the great international Eveready Contest *beginning June 1 and ending August 1, 1920!*

For, beginning May 1st, dealers everywhere throughout the U. S. and Canada will display a remarkable picture in their windows. Study the picture and send in your answer to the question, "What does the letter say?" using twelve words or less.

For the best answer that conforms to the Contest Rules, to be judged by the Art Editors of *LIFE*, *three thousand dollars in cash will be paid.* For the hundred and three next best answers will be paid prizes ranging from $1,000 down to $10.

Anyone may enter. There is no cost or obligation of any sort. Contest Rules and special Contest Blanks free, at any of the fifty thousand stores showing the picture. If two or more contestants submit the same identical wording selected by the judges for the awarding of any prize, the full amount of that prize will be paid to each.

The quickest way to find a store showing the Eveready Daylo Contest Picture is to look for the window sign reproduced at the right. Full particulars may be obtained from these dealers.

A-3112

With that long-lived TUNGSTEN Battery

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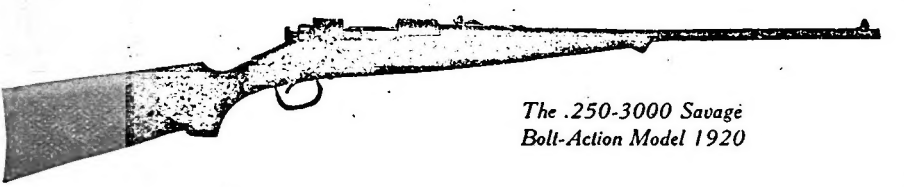
SAVAGE



The .250-3000 Savage
Bolt-Action Model 1920

HERE IT IS!

THE rifle you have always wanted—A Savage Bolt Action. It is the handiest, daintiest, most perfectly modelled little shooting-iron that gun-crank ever got his hands on.

And it is the strongest, simplest, most dependable weapon that an explorer ever took onto an Arctic ice-floe or into a tropical jungle. And it only weighs six pounds. There's nothing patched-up about it—nothing renovated, or adapted or compromised. It isn't a cut-down musket, or a war-baby reborn.

IT IS A BRAND NEW HUNTING-RIFLE—newly designed from muzzle to butt-plate—built symmetrically around the wonderfully effective cartridge it shoots, and combining every desirable feature of the best military rifles with the special refinements which the hunter needs.

Its action is the simple military bolt—but redimensioned and improved. It has bigger, stronger locking-lugs than the Service rifle. It has a shotgun type safety located on top of the tang—the natural, convenient place. The patented magazine design makes it possible to use soft nose, Spitzer point bullets without danger of deforming the points.

The great popularity and success of the .250-3000 Savage determined the cartridge for which this rifle should be designed. This cartridge is loaded with an 87 grain Spitzer point, soft nose bullet 3000 feet a second, accurately enough to make possibles on the 800 yard target and hard enough to penetrate 5/8 inch boiler plate.

SPECIFICATIONS

22 inch tapered high pressure steel barrel with integral front sight base, checked pistol grip stock and fore-stock, pistol grip capped, oil finished one-piece stock, corrugated trigger, corrugated steel shotgun butt-plate, white metal front and flat top sporting rear sights, magazine capacity five cartridges, weight 6 pounds.

SAVAGE ARMS CORPORATION

SHARON, PA. *UTICA, N. Y.* *DETROIT, MICH.*

Executive and Export Offices, 50 Church Street, New York City

ADVENTURE
June 3rd, 1920

Published twice a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York City. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Vol. 25 No. 3
Serial No. 153

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Five Days to Prove I Can Raise Your Pay

I've done it for thousands of others. I can doubtless do it for you. If I can't, then it won't cost you a cent

I MEAN just what I say. There's no trick or catch about it. Give me five days and I'll prove that I can get your pay raised for you. I'll do it on a "show you" basis. You get the proof before you pay me a cent.

You've probably heard of me. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches. There's no sound reason why I cannot do it for you. So let's try.

Now, follow me carefully. I'm going to tell you exactly how to do it. I'm the possessor of a "secret" for which men have been searching since Time began.

There's no need to discuss the whys and the wherefores of this "secret." Suffice it to say that *It Works*. That's all we care about—*It Works*. Over 400,000 men and women the world over have proved it for themselves.

Among them are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsay; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Governor McKelvie of Nebraska; Wu Ting Fang, ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Governor Ferris of Michigan, E. T. Meredith, Secretary of Agriculture, and thousands of others of equal prominence.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with it—barely eking out a living. Today this young man is worth $200,000. He is building a $25,000 home—and paying cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

In a little town in New York lives a man who two years ago was pitied by all who knew him. From the time he was 14 he had worked and slaved—and at sixty he was looked upon as a failure. Without work, in debt to his charitable friends, with an invalid son to support, the outlook was pitchy black.

Then he learned the "secret." In two weeks he was in business for himself. In three months his plant was working night and day to fill orders. During 1916 the profits were $20,000. During 1917 the profits ran close to $40,000. And this genial 64-year-young man is enjoying pleasures and comforts he little dreamed would ever be his.

I could tell you thousands of similar instances. But there's no need to do this as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can

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put it to work and see what it will do for you. I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has about as much chance of attaining success in life as a railway engine has of crossing the continent without steam. The biggest ideas have no value without will-power to "put them over." Yet the will, although heretofore entirely neglected, can be trained into wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in whatever form you want it—will come as easy as failure came before. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

A Few Examples

Personal Experiences

Among over 100,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsay; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster General Grilt; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, of Detroit; Gov. Ferris of Michigan, E. T. Meredith, Secretary of Agriculture, and many others of equal prominence.

$300 Profit from One Day's Reading

"The result from one day's study netted me $300 cash. I think it a great book and would not be without it for ten times the cost."—Colonel S. W. Wilkie, Roscoe, So. Dakota.

Worth $15,000 and More

"The book has been worth more than $15,000 to me."—Oscar B. Sheppard.

Would be Worth $100,000

"If I had only had it when I was 20 years old, I would be worth $100,000 to-day. It is worth a hundred times the price."—S. W. Taylor, The Santa Fe Ry., Milans, Tex.

Salary Jumped from $150 to $800

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from $150 to $800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Cal.

From $100 to $3,000 a Month

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from $100 a month to $3,000 the first month, and won a $250 prize for the best salesmanship in the state."—Private Leslie A. Still, A. E. F., France.

How You Can Prove This at My Expense

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must be a catch somewhere. But here is my offer. You can easily make thousands—you can't lose a penny.

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive, not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book, "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Look it over in your home. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over—just as it has for thousands of others—mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over four hundred thousand others—if you feel as they do that it's the next greatest book to the Bible—send me only $3.50 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by, I'll be out only the small profit on a three and a half-dollar sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

Mail the coupon or write a letter now—you may never read this offer again.

PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
48-K Wilcox Block **MERIDEN, CONN.**

PELTON PUBLISHING COMPANY
48-K Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit $3.50 or remail the book to you in five days.

Name .....

Address .....

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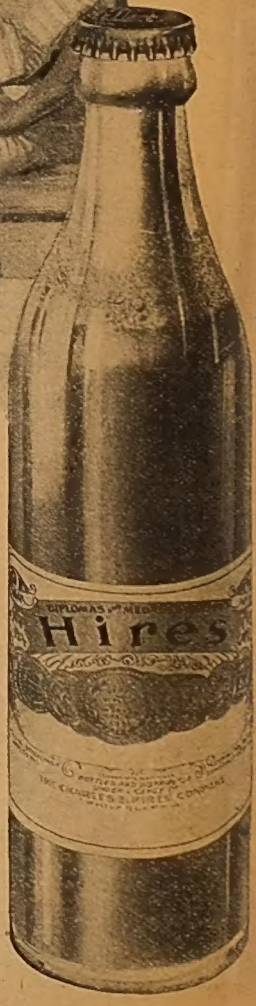

Hires *For the Nation's Homes*

HIRES, a fountain favorite, is now everywhere available in bottled form also. Hires in bottles for the home is the same good drink that you have found it at soda fountains.

Nothing goes into Hires but the pure healthful juices of roots, barks, herbs, berries—and pure cane sugar. The quality of Hires is maintained in spite of tremendously increased costs of ingredients. Yet you pay no more for Hires than you do for an artificial imitation.

But be sure you ask your dealer for "Hires" just as you say "Hires" at a soda fountain.

THE CHARLES E. HIRES COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA

Hires contains juices of 16 roots, barks, herbs and berries

Hires *in bottles*

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Ten years
without a corn

Countless people boast that record now.

Years ago they started using Blue-jay. Never since has a corn pained twice. And never has a corn stayed a week.

You can quickly prove that corns are needless. Millions have already done it.

Think what it means.

No more paring, no more pain, no more unsightly pads. Dainty shoes without unhappy hours.

Apply a touch of liquid Blue-jay or a Blue-jay plaster.

The corn pain will end. And soon the whole corn will loosen and come out.

The action is gentle but sure. Blue-jay is the scientific method, created by this world-famed laboratory.

It is not like the methods which are harsh and crude.

Try Blue-jay on one corn. Buy it tonight from your druggist. Live the rest of your life without corns.

B&B Blue-jay
Plaster or Liquid
The Scientific Corn Ender

BAUER & BLACK, Chicago, New York, Toronto
Makers of Sterile Surgical Dressings and Allied Products

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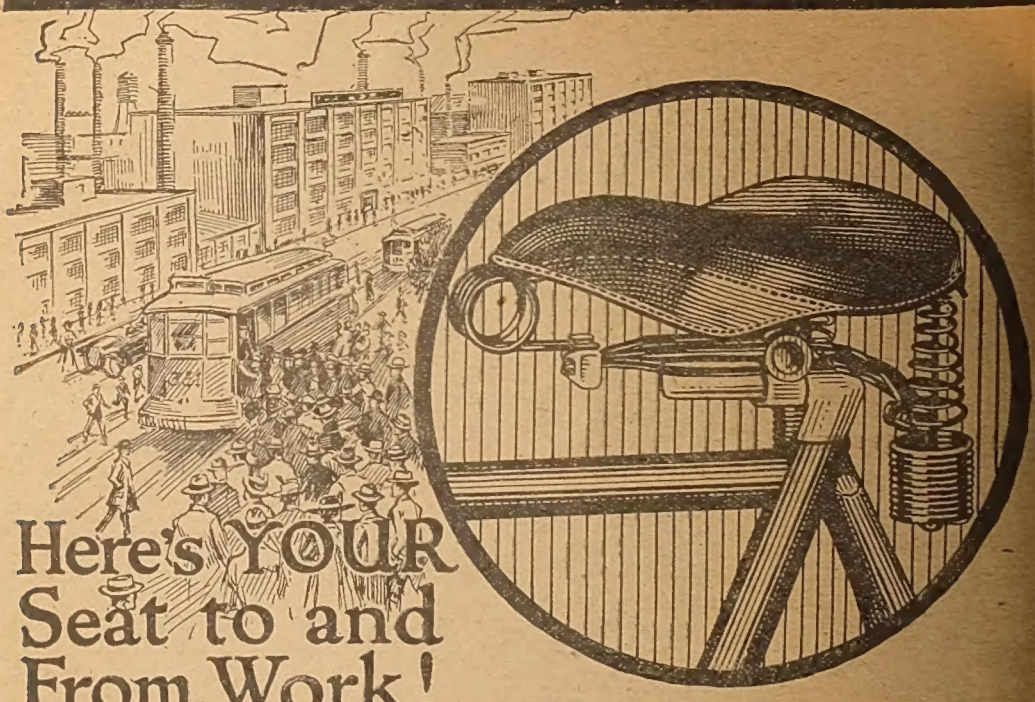

Here's YOUR Seat to and From Work!

Tiresome strap-hanging is *avoided*—boosted trolley fares *saved*—comfort and health *promoted*—lost time *done away with*—when you sit in the easy saddle of a 1920

Columbia BICYCLE

This American family's time, money, and health saver *is soon paid for with saved trolley fares and a nest-egg started.*

Swift, smooth-running, light weight but powerfully strong, trim, and equipped with the absolute best of everything, you will find the Columbia the favorite wherever those who work with hand and brain have investigated bicycle values.

Your local dealer will gladly explain the superiority of the 1920 Columbia and its many big features. See him *today* and *start saving.*

Send for 1920 Columbia Catalog,— showing models and types for everybody, all at reasonable prices.

WESTFIELD MANUFACTURING CO.
44 Lozier Ave., Westfield, Mass.

Ride a Bicycle

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Dainty Athletic Underwear for Every Woman Every Day

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REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

A Better Athletic Underwear Sold in a Cleaner way

"Little Brother and Little Sister Sealpax"
Dad's Comfort for Dad's Kids.

Cool as the spray from a billow! *Clean* as flying snowflakes! *Comfortable* as your "birthday suit."

That's the Sealpax recipe for a Summer of coolness and comfort! Airy fabric, cut for athletic freedom

—delivered to you snowy and spotless in the Sanitary Sealpax Envelope! Sealpax is the cool, clean, comfortable underwear for men. Get it at your dealer. Write us for "The Sealpax Family" Booklet.

THE SEALPAX COMPANY
BALTIMORE, MD.

IT'S COOL

IT'S CLEAN

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The Dream That Betrayed

In the quiet of the night, all alone in her room—she dreamed a terrible dream of a snake with the head of a man. Not one human being was there—no sound came from her lips. Yet this dream—her own secret—betrayed her thoughts, her feelings, her very life, to that master detective

CRAIG KENNEDY

The American Sherlock Holmes

ARTHUR B. REEVE

The American Conan Doyle

He is the detective genius of our age. He has taken science—science that stands for this age—and allied it to the mystery and romance of detective fiction. Even to the smallest detail, every bit of the plot is worked out scientifically. For nearly ten years, America has been watching this Craig Kennedy—marveling at the strange, new, startling things that detective-hero would unfold. Such plots—such suspense—with real, vivid people moving through the maelstrom of life! Frenchmen have mastered the art of terror stories. English writers have thrilled whole nations by their artful heroes. Russian ingenuity has fashioned wild tales of mystery. But all these seem old-fashioned—out of date—beside the infinite variety—the weird excitement of ARTHUR B. REEVE'S tales.

FREE—POE 10 VOLUMES

To those who send the coupon promptly, we will give FREE a set of Edgar Allan Poe's works in 10 volumes.

When the police of New York failed to solve one of the most fearful murder mysteries of the time, Edgar Allan Poe—far off there in Paris—found the solution. The story is in these volumes.

He was a detective by instinct—he was a story-teller by divine inspiration. Before or since—no one has ever had his power to make your hair stand on end—to send chills up your back—to hold you in terror—horror! To read breathlessly—to try to guess the ending—to enjoy the perfect, flawless style—to feel the power of the master—that is all you can do in each and all of Poe's undying stories. In England and France, Edgar Allan Poe is held to be the greatest writer that America has produced. To them he is the great American classic.

This is a wonderful combination. Here are two of the greatest writers of mystery and scientific detective stories. You can get the Reeve at a remarkably low price and the Poe FREE for a short time only.

Cut out this coupon and mail it today

HARPER & BROTHERS *Established 1817*

HARPER & BROTHERS Adv.—6-3-20
32 Franklin Square, New York

Send me, all charges prepaid, set of Arthur B. Reeve—in 12 volumes. Also send me, absolutely FREE, the set of Edgar Allan Poe—in 10 volumes. If the books are not satisfactory, I will return both sets within 10 days at your expense. Otherwise I will send you $1 within 5 days, and $2 a month for 14 months.

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Send No Money!

Ladies' Solitaire—Examination Free, Rock Bottom Price—10 Months to Pay.

DON'T buy the Diamond for "Her" until you first see this Diamond Solitaire Ring. Send no money. Examine it FIRST, then if you decide to keep it pay only $2.00. Buying direct assures you the Rock Bottom Price. Think of it! A brilliant perfectly cut blue-white Diamond in ladies' Standard solid gold setting for only $2.80 a month!

$2.80 A Month

Buy To-day 10 Months to pay

Take Advantage

of this amazing offer to-day. Just send a penny post card with your name and address asking us to ship you this ring. Pay the postman only $2.00 on arrival. YOUR MONEY BACK *if you are not satisfied. No Security—No Red Tape.*

A POSTAL BRINGS YOU THE GREATEST DIAMOND WATCH AND JEWELRY BOOK EVER PUBLISHED

Whether you order this ring or not, let us send you this De Luxe Catalog FREE, containing descriptions of rings, watches, diamonds and other articles of jewelry. Everything sent on FREE EXAMINATION. Ten months to pay on everything. Address Dept. 98K.

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L. W. SWEET & CO., Inc.

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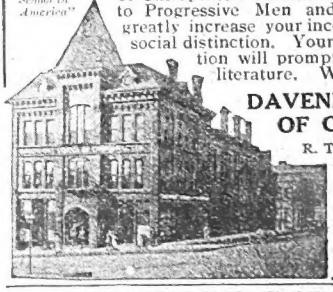
Enter A New Profession

—where the field is not overcrowded and the opportunity constantly increasing. The Science of Chiropractic offers the greatest advantages to Progressive Men and Women. It will greatly increase your income and add to your social distinction. Your request for information will promptly bring interesting literature. Write today.



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Removes Dandruff—Stops Hair Falling
Restores Color and Beauty to Gray and Faded Hair
50c. and $1.00 at druggists.
Hiscox Chem. Wks. Patchogue, N. Y.

HINDERCORNS Removes Corns, Callouses, etc., stops all pain, ensures comfort to the feet, makes walking easy. 15c. by mail or at Druggists. Hiscox Chemical Works, Patchogue, N. Y.

LEARN TO DANCE!

You can learn Fox-Trot, One-Step, Two-Step, Waltz and latest "up-to-the-minute" society dances *in your own home* by the wonderful **Peak System** of Mail Instruction.

New Diagram Method. Easily learned; no music needed; thousands taught successfully.

Write for Special Terms. Send *today* for FREE information and surprisingly low offer.

WILLIAM CHANDLER PEAK, M. B.
Room 876 **821 Crescent Place—Chicago, Ill.**

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How I Improved My Memory In One Evening

The Amazing Experience of Victor Jones

"Of *course* I place you! Mr. Addison Sims of Seattle.

"If I remember correctly—and I *do* remember correctly—Mr. Burroughs, the lumberman, introduced me to you at the luncheon of the Seattle Rotary Club three years ago in May. This is a pleasure indeed! I haven't laid eyes on you since that day. How is the grain business? And how did that amalgamation work out?"

The assurance of the speaker—in the crowded corridor of the Hotel McAlpin—compelled me to turn and look at him, though I must say it is not my usual habit to "listen in" even in a hotel lobby.

"He is David M. Roth, the most famous memory expert in the United States," said my friend Kennedy, answering my question before I could get it out. "He will show you a lot more wonderful things than that, before the evening is over."

And he did.

As we went into the banquet room the toastmaster was introducing a long line of guests to Mr. Roth. I got in line and when it came my turn, Mr. Roth asked, "What are your initials, Mr. Jones, and your business connection and telephone number?" Why he asked this I learned later, when he picked out from the crowd the 60 men he had met two hours before and called each by name without a mistake. What is more, he named each man's business and telephone number, for good measure.

I won't tell you all the other amazing things this man did except to tell how he called back; without a minute's hesitation, long lists of numbers, bank clearings, prices, lot numbers, parcel post rates and anything else the guests had given him in rapid order.

* * * * * *

When I met Mr. Roth again—which you may be sure I did the first chance I got—he rather bowled me over by saying, in his quiet, modest way:

"There is nothing miraculous about my remembering anything I want to remember, whether it be names, faces, figures, facts or something I have read in a magazine.

"You can do this just as easily as I do. Anyone with an average mind can learn quickly to do exactly the same things which seem so miraculous when I do them.

"My own memory," continued Mr. Roth, "was originally very faulty. Yes, it was—a really **poor** memory. On meeting a man I would lose his name in thirty seconds, while now there are probably 10,000 men and women in the United States, many of whom I have met but once, whose names I can tell instantly on meeting them."

"That is all right for you, Mr. Roth," I interrupted, "you have given years to it. But how about me?"

"Mr. Jones," he replied, "I can teach you the secret of a good memory in one evening. This is not a guess, because I have done it with thousands of pupils. In the first of seven simple lessons which I have prepared for home study, I show you the basic principle of my whole system and you will find it—not hard work as you might fear—but just like playing a fascinating game. I will prove it to you."

He didn't have to prove it. His Course did; I got it the very next day from his publishers, the Independent Corporation.

When I tackled the first lesson, I suppose I was the most surprised man in forty-eight states to find that I had learned—in about one hour—how to remember a list of one hundred words so that I could call them off forward and back without a single mistake.

That first lesson **stuck.** And so did the other six.

Read this letter from Terence J. McManus, of the firm of Olcott, Bonynge, McManus & Ernest, Attorneys and Counsellors at Law, 170 Broadway, and one of the most famous trial lawyers in New York:

> "May I take occasion to state that I regard your service in giving this system to the world as a public benefaction. The wonderful simplicity of the method, and the ease with which its principles may be acquired, especially appeal to me. I may add that I already had occasion to test the effectiveness of the first two lessons in the preparation for trial of an important action in which I am about to engage."

Mr. McManus didn't put it a bit too strong. The Roth Course is priceless! I can absolutely **count** on my memory now. I can call the name of most any man I have met before—and I am getting better all the time. I can remember any figures I wish to remember. Telephone numbers come to mind instantly, once I have filed them by Mr. Roth's easy method. Street addresses are just as easy.

The old fear of forgetting (you know what that is) has vanished. I used to be "scared still" on my feet because I wasn't **sure.** I couldn't remember what I wanted to say.

Now I am sure of myself, and confident and "easy as an old shoe" when I get out my feet at the club, or at a banquet, or in a business meeting, or in any social gathering.

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of it all is that I have become a good conversationalist—and I used to be as silent as a sphinx when I got into a crowd of people who knew things.

Now I can call up like a flash of lightning most any fact I want right at the instant I need it most. I used to think a "hair trigger" memory belonged only to the prodigy and genius. Now I see that every man of us has that kind of a memory if he only knows how to make it work right.

I tell you it is a wonderful thing, after groping around in the dark for so many years to be able to switch the big searchlight on your mind and see instantly everything you want to remember.

This Roth Course will do wonders in your office.

Since we took it up you never hear anyone in **our** office say "I guess" or "I think it was about so much" or "I forget that right now" or "I can't remember" or "I must look up his name." Now they are right there with the answer—like a shot.

Have you ever heard of "**Multigraph**" Smith? Real name H. Q. Smith, Division Manager of the Multigraph Sales Company, Ltd., in Montreal. Here is just a bit from a letter of his that I saw last week:

> "Here is the whole thing **in a nutshell:** Mr. Roth has a most remarkable Memory Course. It is simple, and easy as falling off a log. Yet with one hour a day of practice anyone—I don't care who he is—can improve his Memory 100% in a week and 1,000% in six months."

My advice to you is don't wait another minute. Send to Independent Corporation for Mr. Roth's amazing course and see what a wonderful memory you have got. Your dividends in **increased earning power** will be enormous.

VICTOR JONES.

Send No Money

So confident is the Independent Corporation, the publishers of the Roth Memory Course, that once you have an opportunity to see in your own home how easy it is to double, yes, triple your memory power in a few short hours, that they are willing to send the course on free examination.

Don't send any money. Merely mail the coupon or write a letter and the complete course will be sent, all charges prepaid, at once. If you are not entirely satisfied send it back any time within five days after you receive it and you will owe nothing.

On the other hand, if you are as pleased as are the thousands of other men and women who have used the course, send only $5 in full payment. You take no risk and you have everything to gain, so mail the coupon now before this remarkable offer is withdrawn.

Independent Corporation
Dept. R-476, 119 West 40th St., New York
FREE EXAMINATION COUPON

Independent Corporation
Publishers of The Independent Weekly
Dept. R-476, 119 West 40th St., New York

You may send me the Course or Courses checked below. Within five days after receipt I will either remail them or send you $5 for each **in** full payment.

- ☐ ROTH MEMORY COURSE *By* David M. Roth
- ☐ HOW TO READ CHARACTER AT SIGHT *By* Dr. K. M. H. Blackford
- ☐ MASTERY OF SPEECH *By* Frederick Houk Law
- ☐ SUPER-SALESMANSHIP ($7) *By* Arthur Newcomb
- ☐ PURINTON COURSE IN PERSONAL EFFICIENCY *By* Edward Earle Purinton
- ☐ FERRIN HOME-ACCOUNT SYSTEM ($3) *By* Wesley W. Ferrin

Name .....

Address .....

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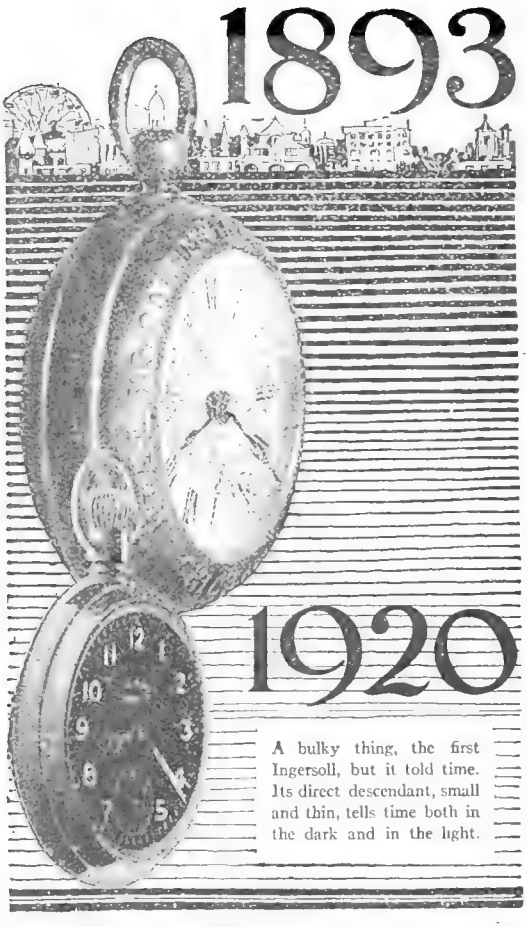
1893
1920
A bulky thing, the first Ingersoll, but it told time. Its direct descendant, small and thin, tells time both in the dark and in the light.

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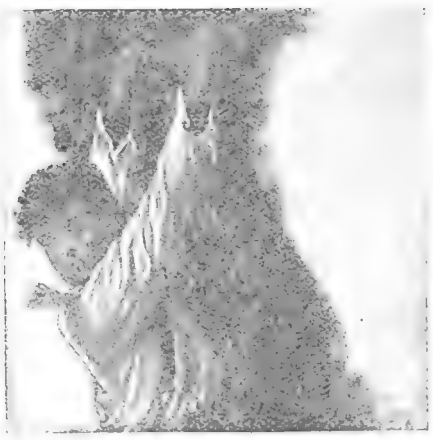

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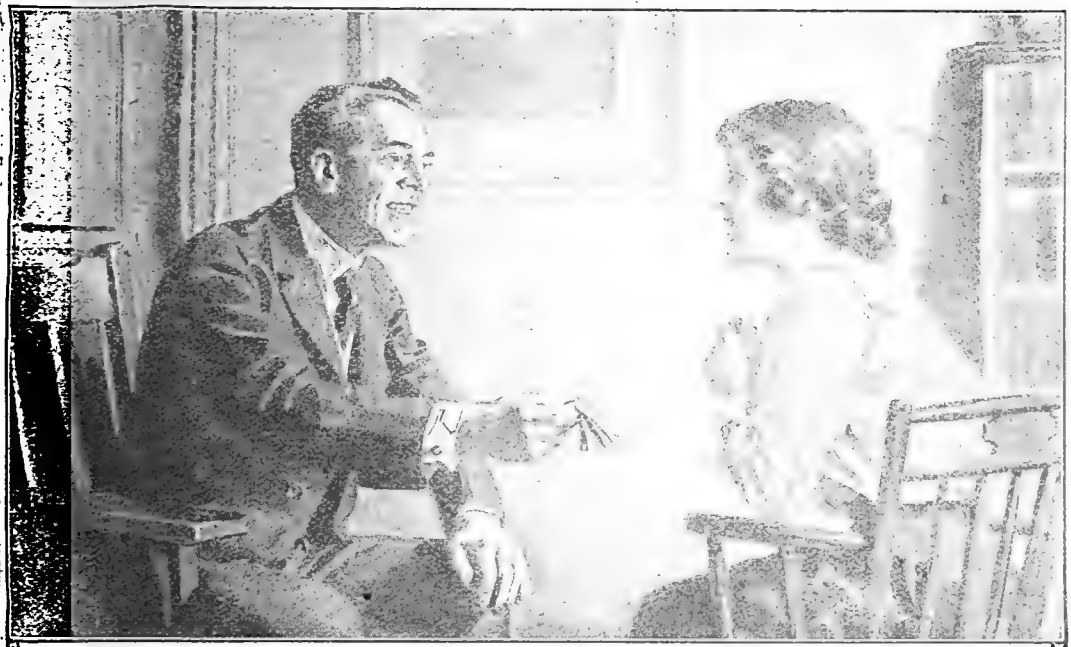

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IMPORTANT!

TO OUR READERS

BECAUSE of the printers' strike last Fall two months' work was lost on the production of *Adventure*. It has taken more than half a year to make up one of these months. Instead of waiting another half-year to get *Adventure* back on schedule we are omitting the two May issues, calling the present issue that of June 3. The change is a purely formal one, the continuity of stories being unaffected. Subscriptions now running will be extended two issues.

ALSO, because of the heavily increased cost of labor following the printers' strike and because of the increased cost of material, *Adventure* is forced to increase the price per copy to twenty-five cents, beginning with the present issue, and the subscription price to $4.00 a year, effective May 15, 1920.

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Adventure
JUNE 3
1920
VOL. XXV
NO. 3

THE LION CUB

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

HAROLD LAMB

Author of "Khlit," "Ameer of the Sea," etc.

Who can lift the veil of the unseen? And who can read the handwriting of Fate?

Jhilam the Mighty, the stronghold of the hills, had been fief of the sires of Sattar Singh since the time of Ram. Now Sattar Singh, Lord of Jhilam, was dead.

And Rani Begum, wearing the white robe of widowhood for Sattar Singh, brought the keys of Jhilam castle and laid them before Jahangir, the Mogul, as was the law. But her heart was heavy.

"Lord of the World," cried Rani Begum—and her fear was a great fear at sight of the mask of anger that overspread the face of the Mogul—"my Lord Sattar Singh swore that the keys of Jhilam of the Hills should be held by none but our son Rao Singh. Such is our right."

"Is the oath of a hill chief greater than the word of the Mogul?" said Jahangir.

So it came to pass that Jahangir the Mogul, Lord of the Punjab, of the Dekkan, of Sind and all Hindustan, gave the fief of Jhilam to one Shaista Mirza, a Persian. But the allegiance of the men of Jhilam he could not give.

Allah in his mercy laid the hand of death upon Rani Begum. It was written that this should be.

Who can look beyond the veil of the future? Yet the thought came to me in a vision that the treasure of Jhilam should be found. And in the vision was the dark form of the Angel of Death.—*From the tale of Ahmad Rumi.*

THE hour of sunset prayer was past. Ahmad Rumi, teller of legends, folded his prayer-carpet neatly and placed it within his bundle and seated himself at the side of the caravan-track. This was the trail from the Wular lake to the southern border of Kashmir. And it was the year 1609 of the Christian era.

Carefully the legend-teller adjusted the folds of his white turban and ate sparingly of dates which he took from his girdle,

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leaning on his staff the while. The sun had gone down behind the willows at his back; the shadows lengthened, dwindled and formed again under the pale light of a new moon.

Except for the loom of the turban against the underbrush, touched by the faint fingers of moonlight, the form of Ahmad Rumi was invisible. He sat very quiet, sensing the change of hour by the night chill. For Ahmad Rumi was blind.

He lifted his head at a sound from above him on the caravan-track. Other sounds reached him, blended and confused, but clear to the blind man. Three horses were approaching.

Three Arabian horses, bearing heavy men perhaps in armor. So reasoned Ahmad Rumi and drew farther back into the willows. Years had taught him the different tread of a Turkoman's pony, a Kirghiz' quick-moving horse and the stolid gait of a Kabul stallion. He could distinguish between the bell-bearing mules of a Bokharan caravan and the laden beasts of Chinese merchants.

Slowly the three Arabs passed. They minced along after the manner of their kind, and their riders spoke Persian. The horsemen did not perceive Ahmad Rumi.

"Fresh horses, held in check," muttered the legend-teller to himself, "and going warily. Aye, verily, the tale of the Wular peasants was true. *Insh'allah!*"

He leaned slightly forward, facing up the trail expectantly and stroking the gray beard that fell to his girdle. His wide, brown eyes were closed, and the moonlight outlined shadows under his high cheekbones. Then he lifted his head again eagerly.

This time he scrambled to his feet, aided by his staff, and stepped into the highroad to confront the rider who trotted swiftly under the willows.

"Back, beggar," cried a high voice, not unkind nor harsh. "I have no silver——"

"I am blind," responded the teller of legends quickly.

He felt for the bridle of the horse that had been reined in sharply. His lean hand touched the bridle and the silk shoulder-straps, halting at the wrought silver ornaments.

"The Wular stallion," he muttered. "Allah is merciful."

A quick indrawing of breath escaped the rider.

"Back, Moslem. I must pass."

"Nay, Rao Singh. Not until you and I have spoken together."

For a space the rider was silent, peering at the fragile form in his path. He sat his mount easily, a slender figure nervously erect, in a plain white tunic with silk girdle bearing a light sword and a small, peaked turban.

"What seek you? How knew you my name?" he demanded suspiciously.

Ahmad Rumi felt for the hand of Rao Singh and pressed it to his forehead.

"Thrice blessed is this hour!" he exclaimed joyfully. "*Aie*—should I not know the name of the son of my lord? It is sweeter than the wind in the pine-tops in the hills and more fragrant than the scent of the lotus by the lake.

"Dismount, Rao Singh; dismount! At a distance of a bowshot wait those who would slay you and scatter your ashes on the wind of death. By the ford they watch—three, with arms and perhaps coats of mail."

Rao Singh lifted his dark head and glanced warily about into the thickets. In that age it was well to keep to horse on the caravan-routes, even within sight of the camp of the Mogul, as he then was.

But Ahmad Rumi was alone. Youth and aged man seated themselves on the bank by the willows.

"How know you this thing?"

Rao Singh spoke with the directness of a boy—which he was, barely attained to man's figure.

"You could not see them?"

Suspicion was in the last words and Ahmad Rumi smiled gently.

"They spoke Persian, which I know. They will wait at the ford for the one they seek. I heard the rattle of their weapons. Death is in the air tonight—for Rao Singh."

"Whence came the three?"

"From the Jhilam path."

"How knew you I should come?"

The teller of legends sighed, stroking his beard.

"Many are the mouths that will utter evil. The master of horse of the Lord of Jhilam spake to the slaves, the stable slaves, and they whispered to the cutters of wood, who bore the news to the forest men. Hence I, who wait at the Wular

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gate, heard that this night Roa Singh was to be slain at the ford near the outpost of Mogul camp.

"So I came hither with a caravan from Khotan, bound for the camp. Even as I heard the thing has come to pass."

"Three common retainers from Jhilam," meditated Rao Singh.

"Nay; one was noble, for I caught the scent of musk as they passed."

"Nevertheless I must ride on."

The boy glanced up anxiously at the moon. "May the gods reward you for your tidings——"

"*Aie*, say not thus, my lord! For the space of four Winters since the death of Sattar Singh, who was master of Jhilam, I have lived but for one thing—to embrace the hand of the son of Sattar Singh, telling him the while that there are those at Jhilam who have not forgotten. It was our fate to suffer, and we have endured much, but we have not forgotten——"

"Peace!" whispered the boy.

Ahmad Rumi's keen ears had caught the sound—the swift clatter of horse's hoofs down the trail. But this time his memory was at fault. The gait was not that of Arab or Persian beast, nor yet that of a steppe pony.

Rao Singh had sprung to his feet, hand on sword. He saw a black horse sweep by bearing a tall form in sheepskin *khalat* and black hat. The rider glanced at him but did not pause.

"A hillman," he whispered to Ahmad Rumi, "perhaps a Kirghiz, yet I think not. Presently he will be at the ford."

"The trees are thick there, I have heard. It may be written that this one should be attacked and perish in your place——"

"Then must I mount and warn," cried the boy.

"You are too late, my lord."

The teller of legends raised his hand. From below came the sound of horses plunging in shallow water, a cry and the sharp clash of weapons.

"Siva! It is one against three."

Shaking off the protesting beggar, Rao Singh leaped to saddle and spurred down the track, drawing his sword as he went. Again the noise of steel striking steel, again a cry of pain, followed this time by the sound of a heavy body breaking through brush.

In the edge of the stream Rao Singh reined his mount and stared about him. A riderless horse, trembling with excitement, stood near by, its reins tangled in a human body stretched on the grass.

Under the surface of the shallow water where a moonbeam pierced the curtain of trees he saw a second form that seemed to move as he watched. Then it was still. Silence held the ford, and he wondered at the swift change from tumult to quiet.

Not more than two minutes had passed since the first shout, and two men were dead and two had fled beyond sight and hearing. Into the silence, however, crept a *tap-tap*. It came nearer and Rao Singh's eyes widened as he gripped his weapon.

The *tap-tap* changed to a rustle, and as Rao Singh was about to voice a prayer to ward off the evil influence of a *rakzhas*—a malignant demon—he saw Ahmad Rumi's lean figure approach along the way he had come.

Reassured, the boy dismounted and guided the Moslem to the edge of the stream.

"Heard you the sword-blows, Ahmad Rumi?" he questioned uneasily. "All was over ere I reached the ford. 'Tis like to demonwork, for here be two slain as by magic. By Kali and Durga, protectress of the two worlds, 'twas magic!"

"Nay," returned the beggar calmly, "there is no enchantment save the will of Allah and the handwriting of fate, lord. I heard steel strike upon steel. Is the rider who passed us by slain?"

Rao leaned over the body by the horse. It was that of a commoner—a harsh face stared up at him above a blood-stained quilted tunic. Satisfied as to this, the boy inspected the form in the water. Caste prevented him from touching the dead. A strong smell of musk assailed him.

"The noble who rode with the three," Ahmad Rumi informed him promptly.

"Aye, he wears a gold chain, and the moonlight shows mother-of-pearl inlaid upon the scabbard at his girdle."

The blind man had run his delicate hand over the features of the bearded soldier. He drew in his breath sharply.

"Bairam, master of horse of Shaista Mirza, will breed no more foals," he muttered. "Just so was his beard ever trimmed and this is his Damascus steel cap. Little it availed him."

The two were silent a space, pondering

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what had passed at the ford. Plainly the rider of the black horse had been set upon by the three Persians ambushed at this spot. In all probability he had been mistaken in the deep shadows under the trees for Rao Singh. Yet he had fought off the three sharply, killing two, and had passed on his way.

"Truly a swordsman, he," sighed the boy. "Would I had seen him more closely and that he had joined his blade to mine, for I have need of such a one."

"You have many foes, lord," mused Ahmad Rumi, seating himself, for his aged limbs were not strong. "There be jackals aplenty who would pull down the lion cub of Jhilam. Aye, in the Mogul camp. After what has passed, is it safe to draw your reins thither?"

RAO SINGH smiled, his white teeth flashing gaily from his dark face. His countenance was immature; the chin weak, the mouth delicate, the eyes somber. Like his slender figure, it bespoke nervous energy and wilfulness rather than strength. There was pride in the lines of the thin nostrils, and the imprint of sorrow in the creased brow.

Rao Singh was eighteen years of age, yet he bore the cares of a man of thirty—not an uncommon thing in the Mogul era when fortune or exile hung upon the fancy of an emperor and death was the reward of a slight offense.

"Nay," he laughed, "have not the gods favored, me, Ahmad Rumi, this night? It is well, for I must accomplish a great thing before dawn—" He broke off to stare at the placid beggar suspiciously.

"Ho, Ahmad Rumi, how shall I trust you? You have come upon my path like a spy. You—a follower of the Prophet—claim allegiance to my father, who holds sacred the books of the Veda and the many-armed gods. That is not wonted."

The legend-teller leaned on his staff, his blind eyes seeking the boy with uncanny exactitude. Rao Singh fingered his sword nervously.

"Siva!" he muttered. "You have not the look of one who is blind."

Ahmad Rumi smiled patiently.

"Your temper, lord," he said slowly, "is like to that of noble Sattar Singh. He was ever swift to draw weapon, and heedless of danger. Wherefore his followers loved him and his name is still whispered among the forest men of Jhilam, who are of his faith."

He nodded slowly, pondering as the aged will on events that were past.

"I am not one of them, Rao Singh. That is true. But there was a day when I journeyed barefoot to Mecca, to the holiest of the holy. It was the sacred month of Ramazan.

"There came a Mogul noble with his followers—one who was hunting with falcons and had had poor sport. He mocked me and set his dogs upon me, who was in rags. With my staff I slew one of the dogs, wherefore the noble grew great in anger, and his servants pierced my eyes with the fire pencil."

Rao Singh leaned uneasily against his horse, glancing from the lean face of the beggar to the dead body in the shallow water, and up to where the round sphere of the moon showed through the trees.

"Came one who rode hastily and cried out in hot accusation against the noble," continued the teller of legends. "He cried that I had been wronged, and weapons clashed. I heard little, for the pain was great.

"Then the rider spake to me gently and had a skilled *hakim* make me a healing bandage. Eh—for that I blessed him and asked that I might be the servant at his doorpost."

There was a silence while Ahmad Rumi paused as if listening—a silence broken by the whimper of the stream and the rustle of the bushes in the night wind.

"I thought footsteps sounded," he observed. "Nay, what is written is written. It was written that I should be blind.

"Since that day I learned that the noble who hunted was Shaista Mirza of Rudbar, and the one who took up my quarrel was Sattar Singh; and men said that both had long been enemies at the court of Akbar, on whom be peace."

"Did you ask punishment for the wrong done?"

"Am I a paladin of Mogulistan or Hindustan to accuse those of high blood? Nay; Shaista Mirza is a Persian and the Mogul favors his race for their learning and their political power.

"But since then I have had a hut where the Jhilam road joins the Wular lake, and the fishers of the Wular have brought me

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food—until the evil day when Shaista Mirza became master of Jhilam. Since then there has been little food and my hunger has been great."

He stretched a trembling hand toward the boy.

"Come to the Wular lake, Rao Singh. I have heard evil spoken of you at Jhilam. Those who hold the fortress are powerful. The sword-arm of Shaista Mirza is long—enough to reach to the court of the Mogul. He and his astrologer Nureddin are very shrewd.

"In the Wular forest you will be safe, for there are those who will guard the path to your hut and watch while you sleep. The forest men and the fishers—who are Kashmiris—remember Sattar Singh. And they ask for Rao Singh, his son."

He salaamed before the youth.

"To those who asked I said that Rao Singh would come. The lion cub of Jhilam would come, and with their own eyes they would see he was like to his father. This thing I have sworn upon the *kaaba* and the holy names of Omar and Welid.

"I have told them the legends of Jhilam. Yet they have doubted. They have not seen the face of Rao Singh. Shaista Mirza they see and know his power. *Aie*, too well!"

"Has the Persian put hardships on the bent neck of the Jhilam people?"

"Aye, it was our fate that he should do so. The slaves he brought with him have been made overseers with whips in their hands. The eunuchs who guard his women have the power of life and death."

Words tumbled eagerly from the beggar's beard.

"The tithes of rice are doubled; men no longer work the soil, for the tithes are ruinous; instead they have turned wolf-like into robbers and as such are slain daily by the retainers of the Persian. The village oxen are taken without pay——"

"How could I alter this, Ahmad Rumi?" cried the boy. "Am I one to share the lot of peasants?"

"They ask but to see you. They would look upon the face of the son of Sattar Singh who was their lord."

And the boy laughed with bitterness.

"Truly a poor sight that, Ahmad Rumi—to see the blank eyes and woful mouth of him who is poverty-ridden hostage to Jahangir the Mogul."

The beggar touched the other's foot hopefully.

"Nay, lord. Is it not written that an omen may bring good? It would be an omen—for the forest men and the outcasts of Jhilam. They would know that you live, and their hearts would be lifted up as flowers at sight of the sun.

"This was the message I was to bring. And—our need is great."

He waited patiently while Rao bent his head in thought. Once he looked up hastily at the moon as if to mark the passage of time.

"Men starve in the forests of Jhilam, and the hills that are sacred to you and yours, Rao Singh, see nightly hunting of men like beasts along the lake. A pavilion of pleasure has been built by Shaista Mirza on the floating garden of the Wular and there Kashmiri women die slowly so their agony shall be longer and the pleasure of their lord the greater——"

In his earnestness Ahmad Rumi did not hear the slight crackle of brush that drew nearer the two.

"Verily, Rao Singh—" he rose to his full height and extended an imploring hand—"Jhilam cries for the son of Sattar Singh!"

The boy did not move, nor did his ex-expression change. Meditating as he was, he did not hear the sounds in the thicket.

Rao Singh had the faults and the splendid virtues of his race. Proud, intolerant of personal wrong and brave in battle to the point of folly, he was passionate, short-tempered and as yet indifferent to the misfortunes of those of baser birth.

His years of semi-captivity at the Mogul court had not made him a satellite of the throne, bred to flattery and intrigue; but they had branded suspicion into him, and boyish selfishness. And one other thing.

He was unwilling to take up the cause of his hereditary vassals as Ahmad Rumi had hoped; yet he saw in the suggestion of the blind man a possibility of obtaining new followers. The inbred restriction of caste kept him from association with outlaws and the poorer orders; yet his hopes were stirred of taking up arms against Shaista Mirza.

"Whither lies the place I should come—to the Wular?" he asked.

"At the end farthest from the palace and the pleasure island, lord," chanted Ahmad Rumi. "Up the course of a stream,

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an hour's fast ride, to where the pines give way to a cleared place. There is a place of many rocks called the Wular *davan*—where I have my hut."

Again the boy laughed softly.

"I have prayed to the many-armed gods, Ahmad Rumi. The time has come when I am no longer child but man. Tonight I ride to claim what is mine——"

"Allah is merciful——"

"Nay, it is a woman. There is one in the Mogul camp who has looked at me, and in her eyes burned the fire of love. I also feel love, and it is strange. I will take her from her guards, and I shall turn my horse from the court. If Jahangir's men would seek me they must come into the hills."

THE teller of legends plucked at his beard, considering this. He shook his head doubtfully. Rao Singh had no friends in the court—such was the weight of Jahangir's displeasure—and woman were ever the harbingers of strife.

Moreover the boy had not said that the woman was to be given him; he had declared that he would take her in spite of guards. Whoever stole the woman of another ran a great risk, for the Mogulis were even more jealous of their womenkind then the Hindus.

"A slave, lord?" he questioned.

"Nay."

Rao Singh threw back his head proudly.

"A free-born maiden, fairer than the lotus."

"A concubine?" persisted the blind man.

"Not so. Kera of Kargan is hostage for her tribe. Her lot is like to mine."

"*Aiel*"

Ahmad Rumi wrung his hands against his lean chest.

"The maiden of Kargan Khan, hill chief of the Kirghiz, master of a thousand riders and lord of the northern hills beyond Jhilam. *Aiel* Verily Allah has thrown the dust of madness into the pool of your wisdom."

Rao Singh paid little attention. The rustle in the thicket had ceased save for a dull impact that might have been the stamp of a horse's foot.

"Kera of Kargan," he murmured. "Beautiful as the solitary moon at midnight. Fragrant as the jasmine—her lips like coral, teeth white as water-lilies.

"Her figure is slender as the young pine. And her eyes—dark as shadows in a forest pool at night."

"Hostage for the allegiance of Kargan Khan, who is ruthless as the storm-wind——"

"A pearl set in base silver. And Cheker Ghar, her buffoon, brought me word that she would mount my horse, and go where I willed."

"Kargan Khan esteems the maiden as the jewel in the hilt of his sword. Only when Jahangir pledged her safety did he render her to the Mogul."

"Tonight I will seek her among the tents, and she will come."

Ahmad Rumi tore at his beard as he grasped the meaning of this.

"Eh—then she must be in the imperial seraglio. She is among those in the red imperial tents. Rao Singh, snatch from the jaws of a lion the calf which it is devouring, touch the fang of an angered cobra, but do not raise your eyes to a woman of the Mogul's tents!"

"Nay, she put on her ornaments that she should be fair in my eyes. Twice I saw her face, for she is not like the veiled mistresses of the Moslems."

"Kargan Khan will hunt you, and when he has found you cut you in many pieces which he will throw to the fish of a mountain lake."

"I have sworn to the conjurer that I would come this night to the imperial tents."

Ahmad Rumi sighed, hearing the wilful pride that rang in the youth's words.

"It was the way of Sattar Singh to be rash," he mused, "yet this is madness—and death for the sake of a woman. Surely there be slave girls that can be bought——"

"I have spoken," said Rao Singh shortly. "It is late——"

He had turned to his horse when his figure tensed and his hand flew to his sword.

"Siva!" he cried softly.

Not ten paces away a man stood in the shadows, afoot, one hand holding the bridle of a horse, the other closed over the beast's muzzle. He was a tall man with high shoulders, wearing a long-sleeved sheepskin *khalat*, heavy horsehide boots and a black sheepskin hat.

"It is he of the black horse," the boy whispered to Ahmad Rumi, who had turned his head inquiringly.

The stranger had made no move. He

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stood with powerful legs wide apart, the set of the shoulders suggesting strength, although his figure was spare. The hat was perched on one side of his head. Rao Singh could make out that the stranger had long, gray mustaches, and a beard.

Both men measured glances in silence. The boy was the first to speak.

"Whence came you?" he cried shrilly. "What seek you here?"

He had whipped out his sword and poised watchfully, one foot in stirrup.

"A jackal comes in silence," he repeated angrily, for he was startled.

"And jackals lie in wait," responded the other.

He spoke slowly in the deep voice of one well on in years, yet almost indifferently. He seemed careless of the threatening attitude of Rao Singh.

"What mean you? I wait for no one."

"This."

The man by the black horse spoke Moguli somewhat brokenly. He moved forward and touched the dead Bairam with his foot.

Out in the moonlight his true height was revealed. He towered over the boy and the legend-teller. He glanced at the Hindu's mount appraisingly.

"A good horse, that," he grunted. "Yet the other three were ill mounted and worse swordsmen."

Rao Singh hesitated. The swaggering, powerful figure was that of a warrior conscious of his power—resembling somewhat a Turkoman or Kirghiz. But the man's eyes did not slant, nor had he the furtive manner of a hill bandit.

His dress was rough, yet the curved sword in his leather girdle was richly chased and he had besides two costly Turkish pistols. His skin was lighter than that of an Afghan. Moreover his speech was strange.

"Dog of the devil," he observed meditatively, "this is a cursed spot. Here the three set upon me in the stream. When two were slain the third fled and won free in the thickets. I saw you and yonder beggar standing at the ford and returned to see whether you were kin to the three——"

"Nay, they waited here to set upon me."

The stranger looked at the boy keenly, but held his peace. Rao Singh wondered how much of their talk he had heard. The man had come from the brush with uncanny quietness, after the manner of one who was at home in such paths.

"Warrior," spoke Ahmad Rumi, "this youth mounted and rode to aid you when you were attacked."

"He came not overswiftly."

Rao Singh bit his lip.

"No fault of mine—you rode with speed."

He frowned.

"Are you a Moslem?"

"Nay."

The stranger spat into the stream indifferently.

"Perchance a man of the Mogul."

"Nay."

Rao Singh sheathed his sword with sudden decision.

"Verily you are blunt of speech. Yet you did me a service. And—" condescendingly—"'tis plain you are not an ill swordsman. Will you enter my service? I have need of a keen sword this night."

AT THIS the owner of the black horse tugged at his mustache thoughtfully. From far below the three came the shrill cry of the Mogul's sentries. The wind bore a faint echo of the imperial kettle-drums and brass cymbals playing a festive measure.

"Harken, stripling," growled the stranger abruptly, "I like not many words. I eat the bread of Jahangir——"

Rao Singh stepped back instinctively, but the other waved a gnarled hand impatiently.

"I am no follower of the Mogul. In the Summer I came to his court from—another court. Because of a service Jahangir, who is lord of these lands, gave some horses and gold. Despite that his minions came near to slaying me."

He pointed down to the south, where lay the border of Kashmir.

"I saw some elephants bearing gilt castles, surrounded by fat horsemen, and watched, for I had not seen the elephants before. Then the horsemen and slaves with staffs began to strike me, crying that the Mogul's women rode upon the elephants.

"Blood of Satan! I cared not to see the women. The Mogul is tenderer of his women than a bear of a bruised paw. Bethink you and molest them not."

"Then you heard?"

Rao Singh gnawed his lip and sprang suddenly to saddle.

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"Ho—wait here and you will see Kera of Kargan. Eunuchs are fat; they will make good slicing with a sharp sword!"

The stranger grunted, either in agreement or dislike.

"Wait here, Ahmad Rumi," cried the boy, fired with his purpose. "And at dawn you shall hear the music of the voice of the Flower of Kashmir. Aye, then we shall ride to the hills."

He spurred forward with a wave of the hand and vanished down the caravan path.

"Allah be kind to the youth!" cried the blind man.

"A pity," mused the stranger, "to hazard such a horse for a woman."

The stranger stared after Rao Singh, then glanced at the legend-teller's blind countenance. He tethered his horse carefully, then led Ajmad Rumi to a seat against a rock by the brook bed. He sat near by, leaning upon the trunk of a fallen willow, his long, booted legs stretched idly before him. Here he could see both up and down the trail. Although his posture indicated idleness, even physical laziness, his eyes under tufted brows were keenly watchful.

Ahmad Rumi squatted passively on his heels, his gentle face turned upward as was his wont to the stars he could not see, and waited what was to come with the calm of a fatalist. He made a strange contrast to the scarred, moody face of the warrior.

"Ho, Ahmad Rumi," said the stranger at length, "you spoke of Jhilam and its lord. Something I have heard of it in the prattle of yonder courtiers. What is the true tale?"

Thus did Khlit, the wanderer and the seeker after battles, hear the story of Jhilam. While the two waited the return of Rao Singh they talked, and Khlit learned much of what went on in the hills by the Wular lake and how Shaista Mirza scourged the villages of Jhilam with the whip of fear.

II

IT WAS the beginning of the third watch of the night and the revelers had retired from the imperial *kanates* when Cheker Ghar poked his head from his ragged shelter.

He scrambled nimbly to his feet, then drew a heavy pack wrapped in leopard-skin tenderly from the tent. Cheker Ghar was a wiry, bare-legged man of uncertain age with a crafty, fox face whitened with powder as a mark of his profession—conjuring.

With a sigh he shouldered his pack and began to trot through the tents, keeping well in the shadows and avoiding the slaves who guarded the barriers of each noble's camping-site.

The dense smoke rising from fires of dried dung and green wood had cleared away with the advent of early morning but a faint mist hung about the tents. Checker Ghar sniffed the air as a dog does.

He marked the position of the Light of Heaven—the lantern on the lofty pole erected beside the imperial yak-tail standard at the gate of the Mogul's pavilions. Toward this he made his way, skipping over tent-ropes and avoiding snarling dogs with the skill of one familiar with encampments.

He avoided the avenue of torches by the imperial gate, and the tent of the ameer who was on guard that night. His way led to the *kanate*—the barrier of cotton cloth printed with flowers and supported by gilded poles—which surrounded the Mogul's enclosure. And to that portion of the cotton wall which veiled the tents of the seraglio.

Outside the *kanate* were no sentries, for the ameer on guard was supposed to make the rounds with a troop of horsemen from time to time. Within however were stationed wakeful eunuchs, armed. Cheker Ghar shivered. He knew the cruelty of the eunuchs.

But a stronger impulse than his own will drew him to the barrier. Here he listened attentively. Occasional voices reached him, showing that the guardians of the women were awake. Cheker Ghar glanced swiftly behind him to reassure himself as to his position.

About the *kanate* was a cleared space, on the farther side of this the horse artillery that always accompanied the Mogul was parked. Through the mist reared the summits of the tents of the ameers and *mansabdars*, illumined by the pallid moonlight. For several miles the camp extended, to the hills.

The only sounds were the measured cries of the outer sentries, the howl of a dog, the mutter of the hunting-beasts prisoned in the Mogul's menagerie, or the snort of

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a horse. The air was chill with a hint of coming dawn.

There was no time to be lost. Satisfied as to his position, Cheker Ghar bared his teeth and, taking his pack in his arms, slipped under the *kanate.*

He crept slowly into the moonlight on the farther side. A stout eunuch poised not twenty feet away saw him and squealed shrilly—then his warning cry changed to a laugh.

"El Ghias," the guard called softly to his companions. "The buffoon."

"Aye, gracious masters," bowed the conjurer; "aye, here is poor El Ghias. Eh—I starve for food. There is scanty picking among the dogs this night, and my belly yearns. I remember the gracious masters who gave me silver——"

"Begone," warned the eunuch carelessly. "Misgotten cur—mongrel of a jackal's begetting! We have no silver for you. Entrance here is forbidden——"

"O unutterable vileness, bred of dishonorable fathers and unknown mothers," said Cheker Ghar to himself. Aloud:

"By the gods, 'tis a dreary night, masters. See, I would beguile the hour with a clever trick. A rare sight, noble swordbearers of Jahangir!"

He shifted his pack from his shoulders to the ground, prostrating himself before the guardians. It was not the first time he had come, for he had prepared craftily for this night. The eunuchs had been amused at his arts.

"O thrice-defiled maggot of a dung-hill," he whispered under his breath, adding:

"Bara, grant me but a moment. I have an artful trick, taught me by my father's wisdom. The hour is fitting for such a feat. Watch in silence——"

He swiftly unstripped his pack, disclosing a pot of earth and a white silk cloth. Bara and the others drew near, fired with curiosity. They ran great risk in allowing the conjurer to stay, but his cleverness had whiled away weary hours before this, and now he promised a rare trick.

"In this pot," said Cheker Ghar solemnly, "aided by Hanuman, the monkey-face, and Ganesh, the elephant-head, I can make to grow—a tree. Name what tree you will, noble masters, and it will grow and bear fruit."

He squatted behind the pot, glancing up at them. From the corner of his eye he saw a shadow appear under the awning of the tent nearest on the right—the one that sheltered the women in attendance on the seraglio. Four eunuchs now stood about him, leaving a bare space of some two hundred yards along the tent-line.

"A lie," chattered Bara. "A tree! Nay, it can not be, base-born."

"Even as I say," nodded Cheker Ghar, "it will appear. Name but the tree."

Incredulity, curiosity and uneasiness were in the black faces that bent over the conjurer.

"A plane-tree," hazarded one.

"Nay, a mulberry," broke in Bara, grinning. "Wretched one, sweeping of the offal-heap, noisome breeder of evil smells, grow me a mulberry-tree with fruit! Six silver dinars if I taste of the fruit. The bastinado if you fail."

The others laughed and pressed closer.

Cheker Ghar did not laugh. Nor did he look up at Bara. Perhaps—for the conjurer had a way of hearing all the news of the imperial bazaars—Cheker Ghar had known Bara was fond of mulberries.

"Take heed, exalted ones," he muttered, "and speak not."

Whereupon he cast the white cloth over the pot. The trick was a favorite with Hindu conjurers but so difficult that it was not performed on ordinary occasions. The eunuchs had never witnessed it although they had heard of it.

Cheker Ghar raised his bare, brown arms and lifted the cloth. A tiny green shoot was disclosed.

"Nay," shrilled Bara, "that is no tree but a weed——"

"It is the seed-shoot of the mulberry," reproved the conjurer sternly.

Again he replaced the cloth with tense face. His half-closed eyes shot to the tent on the right. The slender shadow was still there. Without the enclosure sounded the trot of horses.

"The horsemen make their rounds," observed Bara.

He was unconcerned, for none of the outer guard would have dared look within the *kanate.*

"Behold!"

Cheker Ghar's bare arms writhed above his head and the cloth seemed to rise of itself into his hand. A young tree perhaps three feet in height stood in the pot.

"*Karamet, karamet!*" cried the onlookers. "A miracle!"

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The conjurer's keen ears had noted that one horse lagged behind the others. A gleam of moonlight appeared against the *kanate* as if a weapon wielded from without had slit the cotton fabric. The eunuchs, absorbed in the tree, had sensed nothing untoward.

"Pluck the fruit, noble Bara," he wheedled. "See, within the leaves. The six dinars are mine."

Incredulously the chief eunuch, who bore the honorary title of Purified One of Paradise, felt among the branches of the tree. He plucked craftily at the stem, but it did not yield. The tree was in fact a mulberry.

He stared angrily at the ripe fruit he had found and fumbled in his girdle for coins which he flung down with an oath. Cheker Ghar clutched them eagerly.

Then the shadow flitted from the canopy toward the barrier. In the moonlight it was revealed as a veiled woman.

A eunuch saw her and cried out. At once with incredible swiftness Cheker Ghar clutched his pot, thrust it into the pack and gained his feet, holding the leopard-skin.

"Fools!" he chattered. "Offspring of swine!"

Bara's sword whirled at him but the conjurer leaped back still reviling his enemies and scurried under the barrier with crablike agility.

The woman who had fled from the tent had passed through the opening in the cotton wall. Bara sprang after her, storming curses. As he plunged into the slit cloth a hand appeared in the aperture—a hand that grasped a dagger.

Bara staggered back with the haft of the dagger sticking from his broad girdle. He gripped the haft moaning and sank to his knees. His companions hesitated, making the night shrill with their screams. Others ran up.

On the outer side of the *kanate* the girl had been caught up in strong young arms.

"Kera! Flower of my heart!"

She lay trembling in Rao Singh's grasp as the boy ran to his horse and swung into the saddle. He set spurs to his horse and wheeled away from the imperial enclosure as the beat of approaching hoofs neared them—but not before a diminutive figure had secured a firm hold on his stirrup and raced beside him, barelegged, a leopard-skin on its shoulders.

"Into the cannon, noble lord," warned Cheker Ghar. "The ameer's guard is close behind."

Rao Singh swerved and traced his way among the picketed horses. Slaves started up to to gaze, but hung back perceiving a nobleman with a woman on his saddle peak.

Behind them echoed the shouts of pursuers. Eunuchs and soldiers swept through the parked cannon, questing for the horseman they had glimpsed for a moment.

Out of the red imperial tents came women slaves who gathered together and stared at a fat figure prone on the earth, hands clasped about a dagger-hilt and wide eyes staring up into the moon with a kind of helpless surprize.

III

KHLIT was making his morning meal at the ford in the Jhilam caravan-trail. The sky overhead had changed from gray to blue and the stars had paled before a rush of crimson into the eastern sky.

The wanderer had drawn rice-cakes and portions of dried mutton from his saddlebags and was eating hungrily, cutting the food with his dagger. He was alone at the ford. Fresh hoof-prints showed on the farther bank. But here two trails crossed and the marks could not be traced beyond the stream edge.

Khlit eyed the stream meditatively. Often he frowned. He had much to think about.

From the Cossack steppe he had journeyed to the Tatar plains, where he had found men to his liking—indeed of his own blood. He had liked the life on the open steppe where men lived on horseback and there were no cities.

Here matters were different. Wherever Jahangir the Mogul went, there was a city of tents. And a myriad courtiers, ambassadors from outlying tribes, trade cities and kingdoms.

Khlit had been interested at first in the splendor of the palaces and the temples of the Land of the Five Rivers (The Punjab). He had never seen such an array of soldiery assembled in one place. The very numbers oppressed him. Here was luxury, food in plenty. Here beat the pulse of the southern Asiatic world.

He had been favored with gifts at first—

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slaves, which he gambled away, and horses, which he liked and kept. But since the affray with the guards of the seraglio had been ignored although he might still claim the favor of Jahangir in memory of the deed that had brought the wanderer to Hindustan.

The heat of the plain had annoyed him and he was glad when the Mogul's court moved to the cool hills of Kashmir. And Khlit had been thinking. He saw unending caravans bear wealth to the Mogul; but he had noticed that Jahangir drained the nobles of their wealth to pay his enormous army.

He had seen a fortunate Rajput chief raised at a word to the rank of two thousand horse; yet another of the same clan had been beheaded as promptly for a whispered word against the Mohammedans. He had listened while emissaries from Khorassan called Jahangir monarch of the world to his face and debated among themselves whether they should shake off the Mogul's yoke and throw their fortunes with the Persians.

Curiously he had noted that Jahangir and his followers uttered their prayers even while drunk, yet massacred the garrison of a hill town with bland treachery when inviolability had been promised.

Khlit perceived the greatness of the empire of Hindustan, and marveled. Yet these hive-like human beings were not of his race. And he was weary of the silken luxury which enwrapped the camp.

The high civilization of the court held no interest for him. Khlit had seen too much of the evil ambition of the priests—for the most part—the astrologers and the physicians. With very few exceptions each man had his price.

These matters and others Khlit considered while the light grew in the east and he listened to the approach of a large body of horsemen. They came swiftly, but Khlit was not disturbed. He was not accustomed to yielding his place at the approach of strangers. Futhermore he had a purpose in staying where he was.

The leaders of the cavalcade swept up to the ford and reined in with a shout.

"Ho, graybeard!" one cried. "Saw you a horseman with a woman in his arms pass this way?"

Others appeared—cavalry of the imperial guard, eunuchs, archers and one or two ameers of rank gorgeously c'ad and profane in their anger and haste.

"Speak, dullard!" exclaimed another. "A woman has been stolen from the exalted seraglio. Men will die for this. Saw you the traitorous rider?"

Khlit surveyed them in silence. He had watched while Rao Singh with Kera and Ahmad Rumi, mounted behind Cheker Ghar, had taken the upper turn to the hills. Both horses—they had availed themselves of the animal belonging to the slain Persian master of horse—had been carrying double and they had but a brief start.

If the pursuers were set on their tracks at once they must be overhauled. But Khlit was not minded that this should happen. His talk with Ahmad Rumi had not been in vain. Moreover, he had been pleased with the youthful Rao Singh.

"How should I know?" he growled. "I am no stealer of women."

The ranking ameer glanced anxiously at the divided trails and gnawed his lip. He had been commander of the guard when Kera escaped.

"Perchance this will quicken your memory, warrior," he cried, fingering a gold mohar.

Khlit's eyes gleamed shrewdly under their shaggy brows.

"Aye, that is well spoken," he responded. "A rider with a woman across his knees passed this way and took the lower turn."

He pointed to where the cross-trail led into the thickets, away from the path to the hills where Rao Singh had gone.

The ameer who was leader of the party was about to sign for an advance after tossing Khilt the coin when a small, dun Arab pushed in front of him and a high voice not unlike a woman's addressed him.

"Lord, I, all unworthy, have a word for your ear."

Khlit looked up swiftly, sensing a new development. He saw a withered, bent frame of a man with a singularly light complexion and sharp eyes. He wore a skull-cap, and his frail figure was enveloped in a white cloak, a garment of rich texture, with bracelets of pearls at the wrists.

"Speak, Bember Hakim—waste no words."

The ameer glanced at the newcomer half-scornfully.

"Lord, I spake with one who was sentry at the foot of this path. He said that when

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the moon was very bright there came two who stood on the hill above him and looked toward the camp. One wore the turban of an Afghan, the other was yonder gray-beard.

"They watched, lord. For what? Perchance for the coming of one in haste from the camp."

The ameer glanced at Khlit, fingering his sword. The wanderer met his gaze squarely.

"This one remained at the ford," continued Bember Hakim shrewdly. "Wherefore if not to turn us aside from the fleeing rider? It is written that the evil-doers shall trip in their own snare. Why should the man we seek take the lower turn, which leads but to villages? Nay, we shall find him riding into the hills——"

"By the beard of the Prophet!"

The ameer's dark face twisted in a snarl. He signed to his men.

"Seize me this traitor and squeeze his gullet until blood or the truth come from his lips."

Khlit saw that others rode past him to the farther side of the ford to hem him in. His horse stood behind him, but he was surrounded save for the stream.

He did not move as two warriors approached; looking up instead at Bember Hakim.

"You be men of the Mogul's," he said slowly. "Know you Jahangir has promised me safeguard? Aye, his safeguard to Khlit. I have his oath."

The soldiers hesitated, but the ameer scanned Khlit sharply and bared his teeth in a grim smile.

"A favorite of Jahangir? In common garments? Nay, you be no Moslem."

"Nevertheless it is the truth. I give you warning."

"A woman has been taken from the imperial seraglio," broke in the Arab. "This man is a *caphar*, an unbeliever, by dress and speech. What matters a safeguard if he be a traitor?"

Khlit rose and faced the two.

"Take me then to Jahangir," he ventured. "He will remember the one who befriended Mur-Jahan."

"Spawn of an unbeliever!"

The ameer gripped his sword.

"Nay, I waste not words with such. Speak us the truth and you may save your life. Jahangir's memory is short."

"I have spoken."

Khlit noted that the ring of men pressed closer, and he saw a smile creep upon the thin face of the *hakim*. In a calmer mood perhaps the horsemen would not have dealt so harshly with him; yet it was a vital matter—since favor at court rested with the outcome—that they should find Kera and Rao Singh. Moreover the nobles of Jahangir were scarcely tolerant.

"We waste time!"

The ameer reined his horse forward.

"Bind me this wretch——"

"And the word of Jahangir?"

"Is a thing that is past. If you have aided the misdeed this night you will be given to the elephants to trample——"

KHLIT had been thinking while he talked. In fact he had played with words while he considered the situation. To his ability to weigh chances and to act swiftly in the face of danger he owed his long life.

If the ameer's men had realized the character of the wanderer they would not have given him the chance to mount his horse. Khlit's enemies frequently underestimated his strength, and still more frequently his intelligence.

"Stay!"

Khlit grasped the reins of the leader's horse, forcing the beast back on its haunches.

"Behold what lies underfoot!"

Before this the newcomers had not observed the body in the deep pool where the current had washed it. The body of the Persian. They were startled, and their eyes were drawn to it for a brief second.

Time enough for Khlit to spring bodily into the saddle of his horse and plunge spurs into flank. Perfect rider as he was, trained in the Cossack school, it was no difficult feat to avoid the other horses and gallop up the bed of the stream.

A pistol echoed behind him. He bent low, avoiding the sweep of the branches overhead. The others were after him at once. But his course had surprized them, and the footing was of the poorest.

Khlit had chosen his present horse with care, and by keeping well in to the bank he drew ahead of his pursuers, who were on spent beasts. Their pistol-shots went wide.

Only one kept close to him. After an interval Khlit looked behind. He saw the

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little Arab galloping through the brush by the stream, and he put spurs again to the black horse.

The stream turned into an open glade. Once this was passed, and the thicket on the farther side, Khlit reined in sharply. He drew a pistol from his belt and awaited the approach of the *hakim*, satisfied that the others had been left in the rear.

The Arab came into view and the rider slowed to a walk as he neared the Cossack. He seemed to be unarmed, wherefore Khlit did not fire his weapon but waited alertly.

The little man in the cloak surveyed him shrewdly and held up an open hand.

"Peace!" he cried.

He sighed, glancing back the way he had come.

"*Aie*—you can slay me if you will. By the holy names of Allah, I am a doomed man."

He faced Khlit with the calm of a fatalist and smiled. The Cossack lowered his weapon, frowning.

"By the delay," explained Bember Hakim, "the rider and the maiden will win free, and you also are safe—although you had best ride farther. But I am doomed."

"Wherefore?"

"Eh—you know not the Mogul. The girl is lost. And I was the physician, chosen last night to minister to the ills of the women. By the will of Allah I spoke blindfolded with Kera of Kargan. This will come to the ears of Jahangir, and I——"

He drew a lean finger across his throat and sighed.

"*Caphar*," he added reflectively, "I would have accomplished your death. That is a thing like to writing on the sand when the wind has passed. Will you grant me the hand of friendship? We be both branded men."

Khlit surveyed him with some surprize. Verily Bember Hakim was a strange philosopher. Then he laughed. The offer appealed to his fancy.

"Come then, if you will," he said gruffly and wheeled his horse into the brush.

The physician trotted after moodily on his small horse.

Thus did Khlit leave the camp of the Mogul and lose the favor of Jahangir. But as he put the miles between himself and the imperial pavilions his contentment grew, so that he laughed. Whereupon Bember Hakim looked at him curiously, not knowing Khlit was glad to be his own master again with a horse between his knees and open spaces ahead.

IV

In the lake waters glimmer the snow-crests of the mountain peaks. In a mirror a woman looks upon her beauty and smiles.

Within a mirage over the desert are caravans that leave no trace, and wells that are barren of water.

But how shall we see the faces of the gods?—*Hindu saying.*

THE Wular lake was very old, older than the floating island and older than the pillared halls of Jhilam. Older than the first myths of the Hindus—than the ancient story of the *Ramayana.*

It was high in the mountains north of the pasture-land of Kashmir. Yet it was below the Summer snow-line—low enough in altitude to escape freezing in Winter. It was a sheet of turquoise-blue water fed by cascades descending from the snow-line.

The southern end of the lake was occupied by the castle of Jhilam with its gardens and the native village. At this point of the lake was the floating island on which Shaista Mirza had built his pleasure pavilion. Around Jhilam were the rice-fields, the bee-hives—famous in Kashmir—and the fruit-groves that had once belonged to the natives and now were the property of the Persian lord.

At the northern tip of the Wular rose the mountains which formed the foot-hills of the Himalayas—pine-clad and rocky, yet richly verdant. Of late years many of the Hindus of the Jhilam village, as told by Ahmad Rumi, had forsaken their huts to flee from the ruinous taxes of their overlord and to take refuge in the pine forest where game was moderately plentiful.

So it happened that the village of Jhilam came to be overrun by slaves of the Persian and in the castle proper were only adherents of Shaista Mirza—soldiers, Khorassanis, a few Pathans, Hazaras and the Persians. And as Jhilam was the fortress of northern Kashmir all the province from the lowlands to the boundary of Kargan Khan's territory had come under the Persian's sway.

It was a clear morning in early Winter with a hint of snow in the air when a man in armor on an exhausted horse rode up the avenue of aspens through the gardens and dismounted hastily at the castle gate.

He was recognized by the guards and

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passed into the main hall by a gigantic Turk, Jaffar, sword-bearer of Shaista Mirza.

"The master!" cried the rider. "The master! I bear ill news."

Jaffar grunted as he parted the satin hangings over the portal of Shaista Mirza. The soldier, dust-stained and streaked with sweat, prostrated himself.

"Lord," he cried, "may your shadow ever be over us. Lord, I bring word from the Jhilam road."

Jaffar eyed him eagerly, but Shaista Mirza did not look up from his study of the chess-board. He sat on his heels on the tiled floor by the ivory chessmen—a lean man, wasted by illness, pock-marked and pallid with the expressionless gaze that is sometimes seen in animals.

Shaista Mirza was neither Moslem nor sun-worshiper. Some said that he was a survivor of the *Refik*, a follower of the Assassins, the secret order that had held power in northern Persia during the twelfth century. Shaista Mirza never admitted this, and those who knew him best—among them the astrologer Nureddin—said that the Mirza liked the title of Assassin yet did not belong to the order.

He was a man who chose to inspire fear among his followers and his enemies. He did this in a number of ways—availing himself sometimes of the arts of Nureddin, who was skilled in the magic of the time, and maintaining a network of spies among the Kashmir hills as well as in the Mogul court. He had chosen Jaffar with this end in view, and Jaffar's congenital cruelty fitted well with the needs of his master.

Such was Shaista Mirza's shrewdness that Jahangir saw fit to conciliate the Persian, fearing him more than a little and allowing him to accomplish his own ends in Kashmir. This was what the Mirza sought, and he sent the Mogul a small yearly tribute from the rich fief of Jhilam.

Beside the chess-board burned a brazier, tended by Nureddin, giving out the scent of sandal-paste and aloes. The Persian's gaze shifted from the mimic warriors of the board to the smoke of the brazier—a fixed, cold stare that resembled the unblinking scrutiny of a snake. Beyond the brazier stood a small mirror, and in this mirror Shaista Mirza could watch the prostrate soldier.

"You have no weapon," he said slowly, and the man squirmed, for the Mirza—so he thought—had not glanced at him.

How then was he to know that of which he spoke?

"*Akh!*" he cried. "Lord of Exalted Mercy and River of Forgiveness, my sword was taken from me by a demon on a black horse. Verily it was a demon, for it slew Bairam with one stroke and my comrade with another. In the time it takes to draw breath it slew the twain. Verily it was a demon."

Jaffar grunted at this, and Nureddin glanced up fleetingly. The astrologer was a handsome man, ruddy of cheeks, with black beard curled and scented—a man of manifest vitality. Some who stood in awe of Shaista Mirza whispered that the wasted master of Jhilam sucked blood and strength from the strong body of Nureddin.

Shaista Mirza did not look up, but toyed with the links of a gold chain about his lean throat.

"*Akh*," protested the soldier volubly, "the demon warrior flung a black cloak of darkness about him—and how was I to see where to strike? By the ashes of death, I struck, and fire darted from the nostrils of the black horse and turned the blade, which fell into the stream."

Jaffar scowled, but the expression of the pale Persian did not change.

"Verily—" the soldier plucked courage from the silence—"a troop of accursed spirits were abroad in the night. At one stroke was Bairam slain—his head hanging to his shoulder by the windpipe. I rode without stopping for drink or meat until I should bear the news to my lord."

Shaista Mirza signed to the Turk.

"This man thirsts," he whispered. "See that he has drink. Wine he may not drink because of his faith, but water; ah, water, Jaffar. Bind a rope about his ankles and tie the rope to a branch of a tree overhanging the lake in the pear-garden. Thus may his head hang in the water, and he will drink—much."

A wail from the suppliant was interrupted by the sword-bearer, who jerked the soldier to his haunches. Jaffar had learned to obey Shaista Mirza swiftly—hence he was alive and in favor.

Fear lent the soldier brief courage.

"Lord," he cried, "Lord of Rudbar—I have further news. Grant me release from this punishment and you shall hear it."

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Shaista Mirza lifted an ivory castle delicately from the board and set it down on another square.

"Wretched one," he said softly, "you and the twain were sent to slay me and the stripling Rao Singh. Yet did you attack another man. The twain have atoned for their mistake. Shall you fare better?"

"Lord, I have rare news."

The Persian glanced at him fleetingly and the man shivered.

"Speak!"

"Lord, will your exalted mercy pledge me life——"

"Speak!"

"Give tongue, dog."

Jaffar struck his prisoner with a heavy fist.

"My lord of Jhilam loves not to wait."

"This is the word, master," the man exclaimed, his eyes rolling from one to another of the group in feverish supplication. "In the third watch of last night Rao Singh did seize the woman Kera of Kargan from the imperial tents and bear her away."

Nureddin sucked in his breath with sudden interest and was silent, watching his master.

"He escaped?" demanded Shaista Mirza.

"Aye, lord."

"How heard you this?"

"From certain eunuchs who rode in pursuit."

"Whither went Rao Singh?"

"North into the hills, they knew not where."

"How large a following?"

"Lord, they knew not. A wild figure clung to his stirrup. Perhaps others went also. Allah alone knows the truth."

"Darkness doubles numbers—if they be enemies," smiled Nureddin, speaking his limpid mother-tongue. "Also—creates demons, my lord."

Shaista Mirza turned to Jaffar.

"Strip this scion of purgatory and bind him upon an ass with his face to the tail. Then summon the archers to feather him thick as a falcon is feathered with their shafts. Let the body be led through the village as a warning."

"*Akh!* My life was pledged——"

"Fool and nameless one," pointed out Nureddin coolly, "Shaista Mirza did but grant your prayer that the punishment be altered."

When Jaffar and his prisoner had gone—the man silent with the hoplessness of the fatalist—Nureddin lowered his voice.

"'Tis well, my lord. Wisdom teaches that a broken arrow should not be kept in the quiver. Rao Singh has scant friends, yet it were not well to have knowledge of your attempt on his life get abroad."

Shaista Mirza made no reply, whereupon Nureddin glanced at him appraisingly and bent over the chess-board.

NOT until the last move had been made and the Mirza's king had been mated beyond all doubt—it was significant of the relations between the two men that the Persian would have flown into a rage had Nureddin not played his utmost, oblivious of the result—that Shaista Mirza leaned back on his cushions and allowed his mind to wander from the game.

"Aye," he mused, "the stripling lacks favor at Jahangir's court. Eh, at one stroke he has flown from his gilded cage and taken a mate. What think you of that?"

Nureddin smiled, stroking his beard.

"Never, my lord," he responded slowly, "will you occupy Jhilam in peace until the last of the brood of Sattar Singh has been laid in death. And now Kera of Kargan is one of the brood.

"The blood of youth is traitor to its own cause, lord. Rao Singh has stepped to the brink of a deadly cliff, whence by good fortune and some small arts of ours he shall doubtless tumble to his death."

Shaista Mirza was silent for a space. Then:

"Jahangir will give much for his punishment. Yet the Mogul departs with his following for the plains of Hindustan. It is my thought that Rao Singh will escape capture—by the Mogul's men."

Nureddin bowed assent, thrusting his hands—now that the game was ended—in his wide sleeves, as etiquette prescribed.

"The essence of truth, my lord. Yet perchance he will not escape—us."

Shaista Mirza tapped his chain meditatively.

"Nor will Kera of Kargan. Verily the fool has dug a pit in which he shall be caught. Know you Kargan Khan?"

"Aye, being sharer of the wisdom of the Lord of Rudbar. A brainless hill chief blind in one eye because of a spear-thrust and

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likewise blind in his brain. Kin to his own clumsy yaks, my lord, he has room but for one thought at a time."

"And that thought?"

"To rend the man who has carried off his child. Kargan has love for his daughter."

Shaista Mirza made no response. Love was a feeling he had never possessed. Wasting sickness had stripped him of vitality, leaving a burning sense of injury—a craving to overmaster the happiness and the lives of others. Ambition and cruelty were the twin forces that gripped the Persian's keen brain.

Yet he was shrewd enough to make allowance for such feelings—in others. He had studied the human emotions, aided by Nureddin's knowledge of the sciences, of Avicenna's Law, and Galen's, and even Aristotle.

"Nureddin, you boast the foreknowledge of the stars. Can you answer me this: Where will a fox flee when pursued?"

"Nay," smiled the astrologer, "no divination is needed to speak you that. To his burrow."

"And when the goshawk mates, where will you find the female bird?"

"In the eyrie of her mate."

"Aye, Nureddin. Now while the heat of love, rising from the center of life in the human body, which is the stomach——"

"Nay; the kidneys." This was a debated point between the two.

"Nay; the Frankish philosophers claim the heart, yet the wisdom of Arabia, allied to the lore of Avicenna, proclaims it the stomach. The heat of love dulls the keenness of the brain. Yet Aristotle, who is the master of learning, proves by experiment that when animals mate the male is rendered doubly alert and jealous of danger. So with human beings, Nureddin—for we are naught but higher beasts——"

"The Buddhist priests claim we are animals reincarnate——"

"Then Kargan is a buffalo reborn. Yet what I would say is this: Rao Singh will be thrice as wary now as heretofore, on behalf of Kera, whom he has taken to himself. Therefore he will be crafty in selecting a retreat. Yet his instincts will lead him to flee near his homeland."

Nureddin raised his brows.

"Jhilam?"

"Not near the castle. That were madness. Or supreme cleverness, such as——"

"Only Shaista Mirza possesses."

"Nay, but near to Jhilam are barren hills."

"Aye, lord; north of the lake."

"Yet he will not ride to the country of Kargan Khan. So perchance Rao Singh may be found north of the lake. Send riders out to overcast the countryside."

Shaista Mirza stretched back on his cushions, his eyes closed. Frequently he was in bodily pain bred of his disease.

"Send a messenger to the Mogul saying that by his favor I, Shaista Mirza, will hunt down the lawless defiler of the seraglio."

"And Kargan Khan?"

The Persian opened his eyes, and their stare was baneful.

"Nureddin, I have a thought that mighty omens are foreboding events in my favor. I asked for your wisdom, gleaned from the stars. Are the coming days favorable to me? Is my star ascendant?"

There was genuine anxiety in his voice. Like many men of genius Shaista Mirza trusted much in the potent element of destiny. Nureddin considered.

"The season of Taurus is past, lord," he responded. "Yet the days of Capricorn, of the Goat, are auspicious. Aye, your birth-star is high. Great events may be forthcoming."

"Then," cried Shaista Mirza, "we will deal with Kargan Khan—not now but later. First we will find Rao Singh."

V

IT WAS cold among the deodars midway up the long slope that led to the Himalaya peaks. Animals here bore a thicker coat than those south of the Wular lake.

Yet in the Wular *davan*—valley—towered precipices, and in the base of these were caves. It was at the upper end of the *davan* where the gorge terminated in a rock-tangle that Ahmad Rumi had his hut, and the hut was but cedar slabs placed across the entrance of a cavern with skins of mountain sheep within to lie upon, and a cleft in the rock overhead to carry off the smoke from the fire.

Not that Ahmad Rumi could cut himself firewood. The Kashmiris of the forest saw to that—and likewise brought fish at intervals. But now in the first moon of the early Winter of the year 1609 they brought

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also smoke-cured mutton and goat's milk.

For instead of one there were now four in the Wular *davan.* And the Kashmiris ran from a great distance a few at a time to look upon the face of the son of Sattar Singh and his bride.

They were small squat men in ragged gray woolen tunics and round hats, and their women in shawls. They came a few at a time in spite of the cold. They came from their mountain nests, from the caverns by the lake and from the valleys as far distant as the border of Baramula, which was the land of Kargan Khan and his Kirghiz.

In fact many of them were Kirghiz—those that boasted ponies and felt *yurts,* and were of the breed of the northern steppe. And so it happened that Kera of Kargan, who was the mate of Rao Singh, felt no terror at sight of the ragged groups, for they were like to her own people the Kirghiz, whom she remembered from her child-days.

They asked no gifts from Rao Singh, knowing the tale of his misfortune—how he had been kept as a prisoner at the Mogul's camp. In that Winter the verdant land of Jhilam was rife with poverty, arisen from the tithes of Shaista Mirza, and few but the *aksakals* of the Kirghiz *yurts* possessed two horses.

It was a strange court that Rao Singh held. His bride, daughter of a Kha Khan and a beauty among the women of the Mogul, had no better quarters than the hut of Ahmad Rumi, which had been given up to her and her lord. She lacked the jewels and the perfumes bestowed upon their women by the southern ameers.

Her lord owned but two horses, and only one of these better than the average—and his sword. He had no wealth, for he had been shown no favors by Jahangir—consequently none by the nobles of the empire, to whom Jahangir's disfavor was a potent ban.

Yet Kera of Kargan did not complain. She was happy in Rao Singh. Kera was barely at the verge of womanhood—a shy, dark-faced girl with splendid black hair that matched her eyes and a free spirit bred of her early life on the steppe. She was round of arms, with strength in her youthful limbs. This was well, since a woman of the hotter climate, accustomed to the luxuries of Hindustan, could not have survived the days in the hills.

She sang to herself and bound her silver ornaments in her long hair by aid of the mirror of the spring near the cavern. This she did to make herself fair in the sight of Rao Singh, who was her lord.

"Eh, my lord," she had said, "may it not be that we can ride to the encampment of Kargan? It would be well that we should do this, for evil tales will be whispered to him and he will hear naught that is good of you if I am not the messenger. Yet great is his love for me, and he will take heed when I speak."

"Nay; you are mine, no longer Kargan's," Rao Singh had replied fiercely.

He did not add that patrols of horsemen had been seen near the lake, nor that the Kashmiris had reported search being made for the two. It would have been courting danger to venture from the valley.

Here the forest men kept guard vigilantly, and they were reasonably safe. Moreover the chance of discovery was lessened if they stayed in one spot.

"Who shall safeguard you, Light of my World," whispered Rao Singh, his dark eyes aflame with the beauty of the girl, "but me?"

Kera sighed.

"We have many enemies, my lord. I have a woman's thought and wish that we could seek the Baramula and the might of Kargan. He has many horsemen—and his anger is quick. Who can pen the waters when the dam has burst? Let me speak with him and win his pride to our favor?"

"Nay," said Rao Singh again, "will the Khan of Baramula look with favor on one who is an outcast? The time will come—so says the wise Ahmad Rumi—when I shall ride to meet Kargan with horsemen at my back as one chief to another."

So it happened that the pride of the youth kept Kera from sending a messenger to the Kirghiz. In this he blundered perhaps. If Kera had had her way it might have altered the events that came to pass in Jhilam during the space of that moon.

Kera was content to obey her lover. Cheker Ghar, who liked the cold little, still bestirred himself to amuse her—saying naught of his disappointment at the poor fortunes of Rao Singh.

"Ho, Flower of the Hills," he would cry, "when had a woman such rare followers? Here is Ahmad Rumi, who is councilor of owl-like wisdom and can repeat his Moslem

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proverbs and legends with the art of one who is schooled in chronicles and books. And I, my lady—behold the chosen buffoon of the imperial bazaar!"

He waved his lean hand toward his precious leopardskin and salaamed.

"Aye, even unworthy I—unworthy in the fragrant splendor of your beauty—yet a paladin among conjurers, buffoon and mimic without a peer——"

Whereupon he gathered his cloak about his scant form and strode about in the semblance of an ameer until Kera clapped her hands in delight.

"Behold," he chattered, rejoiced to see her merriment, "a eunuch of the royal seraglio."

He puffed out his dark cheeks and bound his voluminous turban in the Turk fashion and clutched a stick, which he bore before him like a simitar, scaling his voice to the shrill pitch of one of those unfortunate creatures. Rao Singh, even, smiled at his performance, and Ahmad Rumi turned his sightless eyes toward the mimic in gentle approval.

Secretly Cheker Ghar turned up his nose at association with the blind Moslem; yet he spoke not of this dislike, nor of the many things he did in defiance of the dictates of his caste for the sport of Kera of Kargan.

"If," ventured Rao Singh, "that was the likeness of him you named Bara you need not fear he will call you to account. I left my knife in the chief eunuch's ribs."

"Ho, verily?"

Cheker Ghar smiled broadly.

"Then my heart is light, for the Purified One was such but in name, and he was like to a thriced-defiled swine that has eaten of filth."

THE conjurer had an uncanny knack at mimicry. So great was his skill that he frequently confounded Ahmad Rumi, who thought that Rao Singh or another addressed him when Cheker Ghar spoke.

With others than the light-hearted Kera he took his profession with grave seriousness. He was at such times not so much the buffoon as the Hindu master of magic. Only for her would he powder his face white and make idle sport. Cheker Ghar loved her as a dog loves its mistress, and this love was to bear fruit in due course.

Often he would sit squatted opposite the fire from the legend-teller while Kera and Rao were together on the hillside and their Kashmiri followers were on watch.

"Harken, Son of the Owl," Cheker Ghar whispered to the Moslem, "and tell me what is this you hear——"

A plaintive cry floated through the cavern, coming apparently from the cleft overhead.

"It is *kulan*, the wild ass, calling."

The cry changed to a grunting, snapping torrent of sound, echoing from a corner of the cave.

"The wild pig of the jungle!" muttered the blind man. "*Bismillah*—does such an animal of filth approach?"

"Nay," said the mimic seriously; "have no fear; I will guard you from defilement."

He bellowed suddenly, hoarsely.

"The mountain buffalo, the yak, calling to its mates, Cheker Ghar."

A shrill, grunting moan issued from the Hindu in such a fashion as to appear as from a distance. Ahmad Rumi lifted his white head.

"A camel complains under its load as the pack is bound on by the camel man."

"Aye," assented Cheker Ghar, pleased. "Yet there is no yak, and no camel in the valley. Is it not magic then?"

"There is no magic but the will of Allah."

And so the days passed under the cloud of danger with scant food and comforts until Bember Hakim found his way to the hut; and with him came Khlit.

THE wanderer entered quietly into the life of the valley, asking nothing from Rao Singh and providing his own meat, which he obtained in ways best known to himself.

He constructed a shelter of sheepskins not far from the cavern. Khlit disliked to live under a roof, and so pitched his *yurt* in a pine grove where his horse could be picketed.

Ahmad Rumi removed his prayer-carpet and skins to the *yurt*, where he fell to talking much with Khlit. The life suited the Cossack, and the *davan* provided good concealment from the riders who searched the hills.

The Kashmiris had reported that the Mogul cavalry were no longer questing for Rao Singh; but others kept up the pursuit. So well chosen was the hiding-place in the valley that it had not been noticed. The

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rock walls were sheer on one side, and on the other was dense forest. Nothing was to be seen from the lake side, and from the overhanging peaks the *davan* appeared nothing more than a break in the forest.

By now the searchers were striking farther afield to the north, and Rao Singh felt that they had excaped discovery. He himself began to make excursions to the haunts of the Kashmiris at the urging of Ahmad Rumi, who felt that the coming of Rao Singh would work a miracle of some kind and aid the suffering peasants of Jhilam.

"Verily," he assured Khlit, "is he not the son of Sattar Singh, who extended the hand of mercy to the wound of my suffering?"

"He is a man half-grown," grunted Khlit, "who loves a woman. What skill has he in warfare?"

"Eh, he may adorn the pearl of love with the diamond of mercy," said the legend-teller wistfully. "Allah grant I may see him Lord of Jhilam. I have prayed much, but the span of my life draws to an end."

He showed the Cossack a white garment wrapped beneath his clean tunic. It was a winding-sheet.

Except with Ahmad Rumi Khlit talked little. Rao Singh and Kera were wrapped up in each other, and Cheker Ghar in Kera. Khlit from long habit made no advances and kept to himself.

Rao Singh and his small colony entertained no distrust of the wanderer, for the reason that Khlit was an outcast such as they. They had heard from the Kashmiris that he was banned by the Mogul, and they knew that, having slain by chance two men of Shaista Mirza's, he could claim no alliance with the Persian.

As for Bember Hakim he occupied himself in collecting herbs, a task which took him away from the valley for long intervals, and otherwise accepted his hard lot with characteristic philosophy.

"Now, my lady," quoth Cheker Ghar, squatting at the feet of Kera, "we have a physician of the court. What lack we now?"

He rose and began to move around, limping after the manner of Bember Hakim and uttering pseudo-learned remarks on the Arabic sciences until he saw her smile.

"Naught save the protection of Kargan Khan," she said, leaning her smooth chin on her arms. "Would I might send Khlit to him with word from me!"

"The rider of the black horse performs errands for no one, O Flower of the Hills. His look fills me with a fear. It is like a wolf, looking into the distance."

He shook his turbaned head moodily.

"A wolf—aye, for he is not one of us. And when did a wolf do a kindness to others?"

He sighed.

"As for Kargan Khan, methinks the Kirghiz would welcome you to his *yurt*, my lady, but we others would have our blood let from our veins by his sharp sword."

Now it happened that it was night when Cheker Ghar said this, and they were seated by the fire in the cavern, Rao Singh being absent on one of his rides.

The hour grew late, and Kera, wearied with the tricks of the conjurer and becoming anxious for her lover, left the fire and sought the sheep path by which Rao Singh would ride back to the *davan*.

She walked swiftly for the night was cold and she knew the way leading to a rock—a favorite resting-place of their guards—by the trail. But recently the Kashmiris had given over their vigil as the pursuing bands had not visited the vicinity.

Kera wrapped her sheepskin *khalat* about her slender shoulders and tripped along in her light leather boots. Unlike the women she had lived with in Hindustan, the solitudes of the forest held no fear for her. She passed between giant pine-trunks and slipped around trailing junipers. A scanty fall of snow had rendered it easy to follow the trail, outlining the bulk of tree and rock.

She seated herself on the stone she sought, drawing up her knees under her chin for warmth. Then she lifted her head alertly. She had heard a heavy tread along the sheep path. Her pulse quickened at the sound.

She had been moody that night, perhaps because of the absence of Rao Singh, perhaps because of the tales of Ahmud, who had been depressed in spirit. The legend-teller had said that he had a premonition of danger.

Kera stared at the dark form that paced toward her, coming from the valley. Opposite the rock it halted, and she heard Khlit's voice.

"Have you a fear, little girl?"

It was a deep voice without pretense of anything but gruffness. Kera sat up straight, her heart still beating swiftly.

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"What seek you?"

Up to now she had felt more uncertainty than pleasure at Khlit's presence. The Cossack was not one to impress women favorably. Yet Kera was not afraid of him. She watched—seeing him dimly—while he scanned the trail, then leaned against the rock with folded arms, his head on a level with her own.

"I seek that which is a thorn in the side of Rao Singh," he said slowly.

Kera hissed angrily.

"I? A thorn? Dolt! One without understanding!"

She fumbled in her girdle for the dagger that she carried; but Khlit did not move, nor did he look at her. He was watching where the pine-branches took shape slowly against the sky and the gleam of the many stars paled as the moonlight flooded the vast spaces of the air from a hidden quarter somewhere behind the hills.

The snow-summits were turning from dull gray to silver, and the shadows deepened. Shafts of silver shot through the branches, forming a tracery in the snow, outlining the sticks and rocks that had been invisible before.

"A thorn, Kera of Kargan. You are a woman and you love. See you not that Rao Singh is brooding?"

The girl considered this silently, peering at Khlit as if she tried to read his meaning in his face. She no longer felt disturbed at his presence.

"Aye, Khlit, my heart has told me that. Yet it is for me that Rao Singh has a foreboding."

"Ahmad Rumi has talked much. He is full of words. He has told me you left a silk couch in a velvet tent to be by the side of Rao Singh. Yonder hut is a poor shelter for a woman—they are like to birds who seek a soft nest. Is it not so?"

The Kirghiz girl laughed softly.

"Who does not like the touch of silk? Yet with Rao Singh lies my path and my heart. My pride is his strength; he is a mighty lord."

"Without a follower save for yonder mummers. Kera, would you ride back to the tents of the Mogul? Then your body would again lie in ease."

Again Kera laughed, resting her face sidewise on her arms, which were clasped over her knees.

"Ho, the fool is a mighty fool," she whispered softly. "He is blinder than the poor Moslem. He has the wisdom of the dullard yak. Aye, though Ahmad Rumi said that he had once been Khan of the Horde. Nay, Ahmad Rumi lied, for you, Khlit, are the one that is—" again her laugh echoed softly —"blind. More blind than the teller of legends."

She glanced up the trail hopefully at the sound of a falling twig, and sighed.

"Aye, Ahmad Rumi is like to one that sits in the dark; still in his spirit there is a lamp by whose rays he sees an assemblage wherever he looks. So he said, and I wondered. Now I understand that he has within him a vision, while you——"

She broke off in contempt. Other women of her race perhaps would have cursed Khlit, being angry. Kera however was gentle.

"Where Rao Singh goes I guide my horse," she added as he did not speak. "His smile opens my heart like a flower. Why should it be otherwise?"

Khlit was satisfied. He had thought to test the girl's feeling for the Hindu. He had done so crudely. But it did not occur to him to explain this to her. He was indifferent to what she might think of him.

He returned to the thought that had impelled him to follow her along the sheep path.

"Kera, the thorn of unrest is in the side of the son of Sattar Singh. He has seen the evil that is wrought upon his people. And he is angry. He knows not the path he should follow."

The Cossack spoke gruffly.

"Likewise his thoughts are bound up in a woman."

The girl made no response, and Khlit went on.

"What has the stripling learned of war? He can think of naught but to find the path to your hut and to lie with your arms about him. Yet it is time he should mount and take up his sword. There be those who will follow."

"Nay."

Timidity—the shrinking of a woman who loves—gave Kera speech.

"Here he is safe. If he rode far the men of Shaista Mirza would hear of it."

"The time must come, little sparrow," growled Khlit, "when your lord will try sword-strokes with this same Mirza. It would be well were he to strike first."

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"It may not be, *baba-ji*. *Aie*, how should that come to pass? The Persian is friend to Jahangir."

"Not so. The master of Jhilam—whatever name he bear—will be well treated by Jahangir. For Jhilam is a key to the hills. It lies too far to the north for the Mogul to muster his banners to attack it. So 'tis said, but I have a thought the Mogul fears to leave the Delhi court, and those who would plot against him, so far in his rear. So he must conciliate him who is lord of the fortress."

Out of his wisdom, hard-won in dealing with merciless foes, Khlit spoke. Out of her love for Rao Singh—blind love—the girl responded.

"Does a hunting-dog walk into the den of a lion?"

"Aye, when death awaits him without."

"No danger lies about the *davan*. The riders have drawn their reins from these hills."

Khlit moved angrily.

"It is not I who am blind, Kera. Hide of Satan, see you not that Rao Singh must slay Shaista Mirza, or the Persian will sprinkle the cub's blood on the snow of his native hills?"

KERA drew back with a shiver.

"*Aie*—it is cold! Nay, *baba-ji*, it is said you are wise in battle. The gods may have so willed. Yet it is but the space of a short day I have Rao Singh at my side."

"The time for sword-strokes has not yet come—he lacks followers—perchance time will bring Kargan's riders to his aid—then—" proudly—"shall I gird the belt of war on the twain. Ahmad Rumi has said that this would come to pass."

Khlit would have turned away angrily, not knowing that the words of the woman were to come true. Yet in a manner such as he had not conceived. Ahmad Rumi possessed something of the gift of prescience which is found at times in men of frugal life and intensity of thought.

"Stay!"

The girl touched his shoulder.

"Shaista Mirza has five hundred horsemen under Jaffar his sword-bearer. I pray the gods that he will fall in the dust of defeat."

"I have heard it said that you are a father of battles. Will you ride with Rao Singh against Shaista Mirza when it is his fate that this should come to pass?"

The Cossack shook off the girl's hand impatiently.

"When Rao Singh is—a man," he growled.

"My lord will be a great *ghazi* conqueror," she cried proudly. "He is one among a thousand, and like to his father. So Ahmad Rumi swore."

Her mood changed swiftly and she looked up beyond the trees where the stupendous mountain peaks of the Himalayas were coming into view under the silver torch of the moon like sentinels taking their posts. A breath of the cold air from the heights above brushed her long hair across her face and she pushed it back, gazing up with eyes dark as fate.

"*Aie*—on the high places of the hills live the gods. Who knows what is in the heart of the gods? Who can pierce the cloud that covers the will of the many gods?"

"I have prayed that they will be kind to Rao Singh! I have bent my head on the footstools of the gods, but they will not answer—save to send the wind and the cold."

She stretched up her slim arms.

"Why will the gods not answer? They hide their faces. Once I thought that they were near. *Aie*—they are cold, and I have naught to offer them. There is no mountain sheep to be slain for their pleasure. If they had an offering then they would turn the sun of their kindness on Rao Singh——"

She broke off in a moan that changed to a cry of delight as a rider came trotting down the trail on a spent horse, passing swiftly under the changing shadows of the moon.

Long after Rao Singh and Kera had gone, Khlit leaned against the rock, pondering many things. And in his thought Kera and her plaint had no place.

KHLIT was not content with their position in the valley. The next day he went on a tour of inspection down to the lake. As usual, he went alone. The ride warmed his blood, and he sought for a fishing settlement that Ahmad Rumi had mentioned.

He was unable to locate it and wasted several hours, so it was late in the afternoon when he returned, hungry, for he had not eaten that noon. He was in high spirits, being naturally suited by a cold climate,

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and he had formed a plan which he intended to confide in Rao Singh.

The sun had set and Khlit had put his horse to a swift trot when he halted abruptly at sight of a body in the path. It was a peasant, an arrow projecting from his side. The man had been dead some time.

Khlit passed him by silently after observing that the trail of several horseman led from the body away in the direction of the lake.

He was now in the *davan*, and scented smoke from the fire in the hut. He pushed his horse forward, rounded the turn by the spring and then set spurs to flank.

Prone on his face in the snow lay Cheker Ghar, his small limbs twisted strangely. Beside the body of the conjurer were the tracks of many horses. Yet the valley was silent, strangely so. Khlit uttered a gruff exclaimation. He was now before the cave entrance. Here the horse-tracks ran, and among them the imprint of booted men. These footsteps led to the cavern.

The snow was gray with early twilight and trampled in spots as if men had struggled. And here and there were dark blotches of blood.

Just outside the door lay Ahmad Rumi, his white beard ominously stained. His turban was askew over one ear and the front of his tunic was slashed in a dozen places. From the pallor of his thin face Khlit knew that he was dead.

And beside the legend-teller was the form of Kera.

Khlit dismounted and stepped to the girl's side. Her dark hair flooded over the snow. She lay on her back, one hand clenched on her breast. And Khlit saw that her dark eyes were half-closed, the small, red mouth half-shut as if in a deep breath.

A simitar stroke had slashed the base of her throat, severing the jugular vein. Her *khalat* was thrown back, revealing the grim message of death embodied in her torn and pierced chest:

Shaista Mirza has found those whom he sought.

Bember Hakim hobbled from the near-by thicket fearfully and stared at the form of the girl and the blind man.

THE story written in the snow was plain for Khlit to read. A group of horsemen had ridden swiftly up the valley, encountering Cheker Ghar on the way, and had surrounded the hut entrance. Some had dismounted and dragged Ahmad Rumi from the cavern.

Kera seemed to have attempted to flee but had been struck down beside the blind man. Her slender dagger lay near her clenched hand.

Then the riders had passed out by the way they came in, leaving the valley desolate with its dead. Of the Hindu youth there was no sign.

"Eh," cried the Arab, "I was at the cliff summit—Allah be praised—and I saw Jaffar and his men ride hither. It was an evil deed——"

"Rao Singh?" questioned Khlit sharply.

"He ran from the cavern at the cry of Cheker Ghar. Two horsemen rode him down and his weapon broke upon the sword-hilt of one. Then many seized him and he was bound. Allah the merciful laid the shadow of a swoon upon the youth—for he was struck heavily on the head with the flat of a blade—and he saw not the fate of Kera. Eh, it was a deed of shame——"

"They took Rao Singh?"

Bember Hakim's shrewd, dark eyes searched Khlit's face.

"Aye. Jaffar cried that Shaista Mirza would take pleasure in the sight of his foe."

Khlit said no more but walked heavily to the cavern, glancing within at the embers of the fire. Ahmad Rumi's prayer carpet was in its place by the coals, and there also lay the sack of the conjurer. The Cossack stared at them meditatively. Then he flung up his head.

From down the valley came a mournful cry, rising and falling. It was like the cry of a madman. As it neared him Khlit could distinguish words:

"Wretched one, child of a thieving slave! O faithless and thrice accursed! O traitor to thy bread and salt! O snake that crawled from defiled flesh!"

It was a voice shrill, incoherent with rage. It panted as it cursed. And Khlit, striding from the cavern, swore in surprize.

Cheker Ghar was running up to the cavern, his puny fists clenched overhead. In the failing light his features showed distorted with anger. He was looking not at Khlit but a form that climbed the opposite rock wall, where a cleft offered foothold.

Khlit peered doubtfully at the climber and recognized Bember Hakim, who passed from view behind boulders on the summit as he watched.

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"O unutterable filth! O blood-guilty, and dog without a name!"

Cheker Ghar shook his fists at the spot where the fugitive had vanished.

Abruptly he fell silent and sank on his knees by the body of Kera. He raised a twisted face to Khlit.

"Thus does one without honor reward the hand of mercy. I have seen what I have seen. The Turk and his men were led to this spot by Bember Hakim, accursed by the gods. Aye, for when the slaying was done he crept like a lizard from behind the warriors and smiled."

The conjurer moaned, touching the garment of his mistress.

"Bember Hakim set his foot upon the breast of the slain Flower of the Hills. For that I will follow the pursuit of blood. Aye, if the gods are kind I will tear open his breast and let his life run forth like water. Traitor to his salt——"

"Stay!" broke in Khlit gruffly. "Hide of the devil, how comes it that you live? With my eyes I saw you dead."

"A simple feat, lord, for one of my profession. When I saw the riders sweep up the valley I cried out. They would have seized me in their hands, but I slipped away. When they bore off Rao Singh I ran after, keeping to the forest, until my strength was spent.

"When I came hither again to bury my mistress I heard hoofs and lay like one dead. I saw not it was you until you had passed——"

"Then Bember Hakim was a man of Shaista Mirza?"

"Aye, yet we knew it not."

Khlit thought of the meeting at the ford when Bember Hakim had ridden after him. Seldom had Khlit been tricked by the art of another. But the physician was crafty and quick of wit and had told his lies readily.

Bember Hakim had guessed that the Coassack knew the hiding-place of Rao Singh. And his pretended search after herbs had afforded the opportunity to communicate with his master. Khlit had wondered when the other spoke the name how Bember Hakim had known it was Jaffar who led the riders.

Mechanically he seated himself by the fire and added fuel to the embers while Cheker Ghar labored at digging a grave with a Kashmiri tool.

Khlit had not eaten but he felt no desire for food. As was his habit when thinking deeply he drew his curved sword and laid it across his knees, stroking it absently. He felt no immediate fear that Jaffar and his party would return, for they must take Rao Singh to Jhilam. It was useless to follow Bember Hakim, who had gained a good start among the rocks, where there was little snow to reveal his course.

Several things puzzled Khlit. Why had Bember Hakim remained in the valley? Perhaps the Arab sought to trap him—believing all the others dead.

If so, why? Shaista Mirza would not want a living witness to the deed in the valley—one like Khlit who might bear the news to others.

Still Khlit was not satisfied with this reasoning. And it was not likely that Bember Hakim had remained to guard the bodies from the beasts.

Why had the Arab told Khlit the truth—in part—of what had happened? It seemed illogically cruel moreover that Kera should have been slain as she was. Why had she not been kept as a hostage? Surely by all accounts Kargan Khan was not lightly to be made an enemy of.

Khlit perceived that the Persian was a crafty foe. And his servants were like to him. In reasoning thus the Cossack came near to the truth. But he did not yet understand the masterly mind of Shaista Mirza.

He rose presently and aided Cheker Ghar in his toil. They worked in silence by the glow from the cavern mouth. Snow began to fall lightly. There was no moon.

When they had buried the two they rolled rocks to the spot to protect it from the prying claws of jackals. This done, Khlit touched the shoulder of the conjurer, who squatted by the mound.

"We can not stay," he pointed out. "By dawn Bember Hakim will bring others with him to search us out."

Cheker Ghar prostrated himself in the snow and clasped the boot of the Cossack.

"Lord," he whispered, "I heard it said in the Mogul's camp that you were crafty as the steppe fox and wise in war. Aid me to bear tidings of this thing to Kargan Khan over the Baramula trail. He will mount for vengeance, for Kera was his child."

"Nay," said Khlit.

Then, seeing the despair in the conjurer's dark face, he added:

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"Kargan Khan will not believe our tale. Shaista Mirza will send emissaries to the Kirghiz tribe. They would say that we lied."

He withdrew his foot from the other's grasp.

"Come, Cheker Ghar. Gird on your pack."

"*Aie*, lord! Whither should I go, if not in the pursuit of blood? I have sworn an oath to the gods——"

"And I, too, swear an oath, Cheker Ghar, though to another God."

Khlit's voice deepened with involuntary feeling.

"This thing I swear: I will not turn my horse's head from the Wular lake until Shaista Mirza be laid in death."

VI

In the end, a lion's cub becomes a lion, although brought up a slave.—*Hindu proverb.*

THE floating island of the Wular lake had been built by human hands. The stalks of the rushes that lined its banks had been cut and fastened into bundles by withes. Rows of these bundles had been laid one upon the other, and over all earth. Under the reed bundles were the trunks of trees.

So it was that a grass carpet covered the floating island. And gardens bloomed with jasmine and wild rose in the Summer—gardens built upon the roofs of the arbors that surrounded the kiosk. This kiosk had been fashioned by artizans from Persia.

Slender pillars of marble—delicate, so that the foundation of the pleasure island should not be overbalanced—supported a cedar roof, the under side of which was enameled. Between the pillars were ranged gilded squares of wood upon which were blazoned certain words of the poets, and paintings from the Persian annals.

The porticos were hung with brocaded silk. In the center chamber were placed brass braziers and incense pots that filled the air with a hot scent. Also they served to lessen the chill of the kiosk, for snow lay without on the bare rose-bushes; and Shaista Mirza had chosen to visit the pleasure island alone with Nureddin.

"By slitting the tongue, O learned interpreter of the stars," he confided, "men may be made voiceless, and by piercing the inner ear, deaf. Yet it is well sometimes to go where there are none to hear or to speak."

Satisfied that the slaves had stocked the braziers well, Shaista Mirza lay back on his cushions, eying the vista of the lake through the open portal. The Persian was habitually watchful, for he did not fail to credit others with his own crafty nature. By virtue of this he was still alive.

Moreover he was well content this day. He scanned the kneeling astrologer through half-closed eyes, and Nureddin did not return his gaze. The astrologer had partaken of bhang to stimulate his brain.

Shaista Mirza however did not use opium, hashish or bhang. He was sparing of wine, for he would say that a man was witless to soften his brain with false pleasures.

"Verily, Nureddin," he mused, "my star is ascendant. Rao Singh lies in chains in the tower of Jhilam. Aye, the lion cub has dragged his limbs to the den of his sire. And his mate is where she will work us no harm."

"It was fated."

"Nay, I willed it. What is fate, Nureddin, but the whine of the low-born? When I placed my yoke on the neck of the Kashmiris, behold, they cried that it was fate. Believing this thing, they will not attempt to rise against me."

"Men do not rebel, my lord, without a leader. And you have the body of him they call master."

"A stripling, Nureddin; a broken pine that leans to the wind; aye, a weakling who found his happiness in the arms of a woman."

He stirred the coals of a brazier with his dagger and drew his cloak about his shoulders. He loved better the sun of Persia than the winds of Kashmir.

"Sattar Singh was a man, Nureddin," the high, soft voice went on, "a man of strength whose greatest foes were his own passions. Rao Singh is a child. I feared his mother more than the boy. So it happened that she partook of hashish from Rudbar in Persia——"

He broke off with a wave of the thin hand. The astrologer started. He had not thought until then that Shaista Mirza had conceived the death of the woman. He was not sure whether this was the case or not. The Persian, a master of intrigue, liked to be mentioned as the author of violence in which he had no hand, and likewise was

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silent about many deeds of which he was the author.

"Power, Nureddin, is built upon a multitude of swords. Sword-arms can be bought. Wealth we must have, and it comes from the labor of the low-born who are the peasants of Jhilam, and now——"

"The Kashmiris mutter and shirk, feeling the breath of the wind of rebellion, my lord."

"Aye, due to sight of Rao Singh, who is of the accursed brood of Sattar Singh. Verily they shall not see him long."

He leaned closer to the astrologer.

"The Mogul must have his tribute—silver coins, while gold mohars accumulate in the treasury of Jhilam."

He threw back his head with a silent laugh that changed to a grimace of hate.

"Nureddin, how shall we deal with the lion cub of Jhilam?"

The courtier meditated, seeking a clue in the face of his master.

" 'Tis plain, my lord, the scoundrel came to Jhilam to stir the fires of strife. Is he not then a rebel against the Mogul? Should he not be impaled upon a spear and left to rot where the kites and the low-born may find him?"

Shaista Mirza smiled grimly.

"The stars have not taught you—policy, Nureddin. Nay, is it well to mention the Kashmiris to Jahangir? He is their overlord—though he keeps his army south of the hills."

"Harken—Rao Singh has outraged the seraglio of the Mogul. So shall we send a rider in haste with news of his capture and a prayer that Jahangir name the manner of his punishment. Thus will we have the sanction of the Mogul for our action. And the Kashmiris shall know this."

The astrologer bent his head and touched the floor with the tips of his fingers as a sign of mute admiration.

"O wise reader of men! 'Tis an excellent plan. But if the punishment be not—death?"

"A simple matter. The boy will sicken and—follow the shadow of his mother. He mourns for Kera—the wanton. So shall he welcome the false contentment of hashish."

"And Kera of Kargan?"

Nureddin looked up curiously. He had not understood why Shaista Mirza had ordered Jaffar to slay the girl brutally.

Moreover Nureddin was a trifle anxious concerning Kargan Khan. If the truth were known the Kirghiz could muster a force of warriors who were hardy men, bold riders and fearless.

"Jaffar mutilated the maiden as I bade him," responded the Persian softly. "Already I have decided to send a messenger to the Kirghiz tribe, relating how Kera was laid in the dust of death by—a certain one. Bember Hakim, our worthy physician, saw the deed."

The astrologer glanced admiringly at his lord. Truly Shaista Mirza was a master of human fate.

"Then will come Kargan Khan to Jhilam like the breath of the storm-wind to see vengeance done. And when he comes he will look upon the body of the slayer of Kera. Because of this he will yield me the hand of friendship which he has withheld until now——"

Sudden suspicion flared in the cold eyes of the Mirza and an oath trembled on his lips as he stared through the portal. A fisher-boat had drawn in to the landing-stage of the floating island.

Then he saw that the figure in the boat was Bember Hakim, escorted by the mighty Jaffar.

THE physician performed the triple salaam as he came into the presence of his master. As a mark of favor Shaista Mirza bade him be seated on the carpet. Bember Hakim's white cloak with the pearls was stained with mud and his thin face was blue with cold.

"Wherefore are you late?" demanded Nureddin sharply.

"Lord, and Monarch of Exalted Mercy," said the physician to Shaista Mirza, "as you bade me, I awaited the gray rider of the steppe. The words that you were divinely pleased to utter I repeated to him."

"What thinks the unbeliever?"

"Lord, one escaped death—a wretched Cheker Ghar, the buffoon. He upbraided me with treachery, and barely I escaped with my life. Yet even in the cold—and the snow fell—I crept back to the cavern from the rocks above and heard the Cossack vow——"

He hesitated in fear of the man who watched him silently.

"What, fool?"

"He vowed, lord, to seek vengeance for

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Kera, and to—slay the master of Jhilam."

Nureddin laughed, but Shaista Mirza moved no muscle of his face.

"It is well, Bember Hakim," he said, and the Arab knew he was pleased.

After a moment's thought he continued.

"Thus we have two alive who are our foes. Of Khlit of the Curved Saber I have heard some talk. A wandering Christian who was once khan of a northern clan. He dares not ride to the Mogul with his news, for he is under the ban of outcast."

He played with the golden chain at his throat, frowning slightly.

" 'Tis unlikely that this aged unbeliever will seek Kargan Khan, yet—shall we leave no hole through which the fox could creep. Mount, Bember Hakim, this day, and ride by the Baramula caravan-trail to the Kirghiz tribe.

"Seek Kargan and say to him that if he would look upon the murderer of his daughter to come to the Wular *davan* with speed. Your tongue is shrewd, Hakim—speak him well, but haste."

He sighed and fell to stirring the brazier.

"Nureddin, the dice fall as we wish—since we have doctored them. For who would play with life with unloaded dice? A fool! And who would invoke a god to aid him? A simpleton.

"Yet is this Khlit crafty after a fashion. Nureddin, talk with Rao Singh. The youth saw not the death of his wanton. Declare that Khlit sabered her. Thus will we plant a seed that may bear fruit."

"If he doubts, my lord——"

"Eh—remind him that Khlit owes his outlawry to Kera—" Bember Hakim had told his master all that had passed—"also that Khlit escaped hurt when Jaffar attacked Rao Singh."

"Yet the fight at the ford——"

"He saw it not."

Shaista Mirza turned to the waiting sword-bearer.

"Jaffar, choose a following—nay, t'were best to ride alone. Fear you the Curved Saber?"

The broad Turk bared his teeth and touched his simitar significantly.

"Then seek the man about the northern end of the lake. Take with you some trinket from Rao Singh. Say that the youth sends a message to the ear of Khlit, having promised you the jewel as reward. If he is puzzled in spirit by this and relaxes his guard—slay him. Do not fail this time."

Now as the four were ascending the bare gardens of Jhilam over the terraces to the palace proper Jaffar espied in the distance on the crest of a hill something that might have been a rider on a dark horse.

Whereupon, after marking the position of the watcher at the forest edge, he mounted hastily without waiting to don his armor and spurred to the spot.

Here he found tracks in the snow made apparently by two animals. Doubtful now of what he had seen, he went forward into the pines, following the tracks leisurely. After a while they separated.

Jaffar turned his horse after one trail, taking the precaution of poising a primed pistol in his free hand. He was an experienced warrior, yet too vain of his strength, which was bred more of flesh than of spirit.

He hastened forward at a curious sound. It resembled the groan of a man. It proved to be but a mule.

A sick mule, wasted and trembling upon its legs. On its back was bound the blackened body of a man long, long dead, with arrows sticking from its chest. Jaffar's eyes widened and he cursed aloud until he remembered the soldier slain by order of Shaista Mirza a fortnight ago.

Then he thrust his pistol back into his girdle and had turned homeward something hastily, for the sight of his own handiwork was not pleasant, when he saw a strange form creeping from the thicket at his side.

It was a lean man in a green cloak, a knife between his teeth, which were set in a grin of hate. Seeing that he was observed, the man leaped forward, running with bent knees, silently intent.

Jaffar plucked the pistol from his belt and fired, only to see one corner of the cloak jerk. He had no time to draw a second weapon. A black horse burst from the farther side of the thicket, snorting under the spur.

The Turk whirled to meet the rider of the black horse. Another second and his own mount had been knocked from its feet by the impact of the other's horse and Jaffar with a shrill cry of terror fell headlong.

For an instant before the creeping man with the knife reached him Jaffar's eyes rolled in fear while he fumbled with his sword. Then Cheker Ghar with a low chuckle of joy sprang upon the powerful Turk, knife in hand.

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That night Jaffar returned on his horse to his lord and to Jhilam. His horse wandered back to its stable by instinct. Yet slowly, for tied to the saddle-girth of Jáffar was the halter of the mule. Upon the back of the mule was the victim of Shaista Mirza.

And, as Nureddin observed sagely, the one was not more dead than the other.

Thus did Khlit throw down the gage of war to Shaista Mirza and did Cheker Ghar avenge her to whom he had given his allegiance and whom he still praised as the Flower of the Hills.

It was long before the conjurer was seen in the vicinity of the Wular.

VII

JAFFAR'S death did not disturb Shaista Mirza, after the first moment when the body of his sword-bearer was brought to him. His anger had blazed up at sight of the dead Turk and he spurned the body with a slippered foot.

"Fool," he whispered, "to be outwitted by a mummer and a graybeard. Waste not a dinar on burial, but cast this carrion into the lake."

Whereupon he fell silent and retired to his chamber, playing long games of chess with Nureddin while he awaited word from his messengers.

The first to arrive was the rider he had dispatched to the Mogul. Jahangir was rejoiced at the capture of Rao Singh. In the royal firman were many words of flattery and praise for Shaista Mirza.

Jahangir ordered that Rao Singh be confined in the prison cells of Jhilam. Death was the penalty for breaking into the imperial seraglio, but the cautious monarch suggested that the Kashmiris might resent the infliction of such a punishment on the son of Sattar Singh. Hence the decree of imprisonment.

Shaista Mirza spat upon the firman, then tossed it contemptuously to the astrologer.

"Behold the word of a monarch who is bound by the cords of his fear! Still it must suffice. When Bember Hakim returns bid him prepare the drug that eats into the brain and creates a fever in the limbs—a wasting sickness. Did not the *hakim* prepare this physic for Rani Begum?"

Nureddin bowed in understanding. So the Mirza had been the author of Rani Begum's death! After all, the astrologer reflected, it was wise, for so long as the brood of Satter Singh lived the Persian's seat upon the throne of Jhilam was not secure.

But Bember Hakim was slow in making his appearance. Knowing the uncertainty of travel over the northern passes where only the horns of mountain sheep and stags marked the caravan-trails, Shaista Mirza was not disturbed. The man's patience where his schemes were involved was as great as his anger at the failure of a subordinate.

Yet he did not go again to the floating island, having in mind perhaps the death of Jaffar. He sat on the carpet of his sleeping chamber, hearing the reports of his vizier, the treasurer of the Jhilam fief, and playing at chess often—sometimes discussing with Nureddin the science of the stars.

Although a keen watch was kept around the outer gardens of Jhilam, Khlit was not to be seen.

Shaista Mirza had issued a firman declaring death the penalty for any Kashmiri to give food or shelter to the outcast, also promising a *mohar* of rupees to whoever would bring tidings of Khlit.

No one came to claim the gold, and it is certain that the Cossack was given fodder for his horse at the Wular villages. The Cossack kept to the forest, pitching his *yurt* where he could watch Jhilam without danger of discovery.

This course of action suited Khlit well. He was accustomed to playing a lone hand, and the numerous followers of the Persian gave him no cause for concern. He hunted occasionally when he needed meat, and slept little, sitting in the door of his *yurt*, his sword across his knees and the brace of pistols on a sheepskin at his side. And he groomed and fed his horse painstakingly.

"Hey, black imp of hell," he observed caressingly, "eat well—yet not too much; for the day will come when you must gallop with the dogs of Satan at heel. Hey, that will be a ride of rides."

So Khlit waited in his *yurt* overlooking the fortress, and Shaista Mirza sat in an inner room and meditated.

Then came Nureddin to his master, smiling, with news on his bearded lips.

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"O Lord of Exalted Wisdom," he announced, "there came Bember Hakim alone and pale with the cold of the hill passes. Verily the thin blood has dried in his veins and the fingers of one hand are scourged with frost. Barely he could whisper his message——"

"What said he, parrot-tongue?"

"This, my lord. He gave me a signet from Kargan Khan—" Nureddin handed the Mirza a ring which his master scanned keenly and placed in his girdle, satisfied—"and reported that the wrath of the Kirghiz hill chief was like the blind rage of a wounded tiger——"

"Nay, a witless buffalo!"

"Aye, my lord. Kargan Khan musters his riders and girds on the sword of vengeance. In spite of the snow he will ride down the Baramula trail to the Wular *davan*, even as you advised."

The hard eyes of the Persian gleamed.

"Furthermore Kargan Khan would look upon the body of his child, so that the edge of his anger shall be sharp. Even now he tears his beard and cries upon his gods to speed the arrow-stitches of retribution."

Shaista Mirza stroked the wrinkled skin of his forehead reflectively.

"Why do men utter the name of a god when they feel pain? 'Tis like to the vain cry of a child new-born, Nureddin. Aye—not even the hand of a god may lift the shadow of destiny. Say on."

"On the fifth day will Kargan Khan be at the Wular *davan* by the grave of Kera. So said he at the border of his land. For three days Bember Hakim rode hither."

"Then," calculated the Mirza, "on the second day from now will we meet with Kargan Khan. It is well. You have talked with Rao Singh?"

"Aye. Yet not as if there was a purpose in my mind. I spoke as if by chance, saying that Khlit had slain the woman. At first he believed not."

Shaista Mirza frowned, but Nureddin raised his hand deprecatingly.

"Not in vain have I knelt at the feet of the master of wisdom of Rudbar, and disciple of the *Refik*. A thought came to me, and I had slaves fetch the body of Jaffar—before it was thrown to the Wular—as if by chance. And the slaves told the boy that Khlit had slain Jaffar. They told how the unbeliever was an outcast in the hills."

Shaista Mirza leaned forward expectantly.

"My lord," continued Nureddin smilingly, "the slaves were simple folk and Rao Singh saw that they lied not. Wherefore a doubt seized upon his spirit as the first sore of disease appears upon the body."

"And then——"

"I sought out Bember Hakim's accursed store of herbs and powders. I bade the warders give him opium, a little at a time. And Rao Singh began to brood. His doubt is heavy upon him. He remembers little of the fight in the valley, for his brain is dulled with the blow and with mourning for Kera of Kargan."

Nureddin stroked his beard tranquilly, aware that Shaista Mirza was pleased.

"One thing further shall I do before the day of—triumph. Bember Hakim now lies abed, gripped by the demons of sickness, for his body is frail and he has endured much.

"The malady has affected his tongue, but he is doctoring himself with rank-smelling herbs and by the second day he will recover. Then shall I send him to the chamber of Rao Singh, and his words will bear out my tale."

"Aye," asented Shaista Mirza; "Rao Singh knows that the Arab saw the affray in the Wular *davan*."

"The boy is feverish with his grief. Truly it is strange that he should grieve for one woman.

"Are there not round-faced maids of Persia to be bought as slaves? Or pale and handsome maidens from Georgia? And even the Kashmiris are not ill shaped, for I have seized certain——"

Shaista Mirza waved his hand impatiently and the astrologer was silent.

"Rao Singh is not like to Sattar Singh, Nureddin," he meditated. "He is empty of mind and foolish as a young stag—eh, thereby we shall profit. For by your arts Rao Singh will believe Khlit slew the woman."

He glanced up at the water-clock that marked the passage of the hours.

"Soon, Nureddin, we shall take Rao Singh to the Wular *davan*, and with him Bember Hakim. Then shall they bear witness that Khlit is the slayer of Kera. And Kargan Khan shall hear."

"Most wise lord!" mouthed the astrologer.

"Take care that the Hindu is plied well with opium. Thus by the arts of Bember Hakim he shall say what we will that he

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should. And Kargan Khan with his steppe wolves will scour Kashmir until he hunts down Khlit."

"Aye, lord, and with Rao Singh gone to the portals of death you will be purged of the brood of Sattar Singh."

"And sole master of Jhilam, in favor both with the Mogul and Kargan Khan."

He looked up where the sky showed through an embrasure in the wall. Suspense crept into his crafty face.

"The omens are good, Nureddin? My star will be ascendant in the constellation of the east?"

"Lord, the star of your birth will rise that night, foretelling a mighty event."

IN A bed-chamber of the Jhilam palace a wizened man coughed and muttered on the cushions of the floor, wrapped in his cloak, while he prepared certain mixtures of powders which smoked in a brass pot over the flames.

He ordered his trembling slaves to fetch a young goat, living, and to let some of its blood run into a dish. Whereupon he consulted the book of the two hundred and sixty medicinal substances as written by the Arab scientists. He prepared a broth of the goat-blood and the contents of the vials at his girdle.

The slaves cringed and choked in the smoke from the foul mixture in the pot. Then he drank the broth and sighed, announcing that the elements of disease had been vitiated and that he would sleep until Shaista Mirza summoned him.

During that night and the next day fur-clad riders threaded through the lower passes of the Himalayas on ponies that stumbled ahead in blinding snow and a sharp wind that swept in their faces like a keen sword.

The riders bore spears at their shoulders, and under their furs wore shirts of Kallmark mail. They stopped only to make an offering of food before the shrine of the Altai-Nor god—a felt image fastened to a tree-trunk beneath a rough wooden roof—to insure their safe descent of the dangerous pass.

They dismounted only to run beside their horses and stir the heat of their bodies. They ate sparingly of dried horseflesh and frozen mare's milk.

Kargan Khan, who led the troop, had said that they would not rest until they reached the *davan* where his daughter was buried.

And during that interval Khlit sat by his horse in the snow-storm, having raised one side of the sheepskin shelter so that it partly covered the black stallion. His food was nearly exhausted but he did not venture abroad for more, having decided that the next day was the one in which he would seek out Shaista Mirza.

During the last week Khlit had formulated a plan. He had pondered it carefully and was content. It was a bold venture, departing for success upon the speed of his horse. Yet in his plan Khlit had been unaware of one thing—the consummate cleverness of the Persian, and the craft of his servants.

Khlit had faced many enemies and had lived while they had died by virtue of his shrewd brain. In Shaista Mirza however he had a foe who was no less shrewd, who planned as carefully and who was master of many swords.

Yet Khlit did not intend to trust to his sword. Rather he put his trust in his horse, and in a thing that Shaista Mirza would have scorned—the faith of another man.

VIII

When the dead are placed in the earth or upon the burial-fire, they are not. Then is the burial-place a place of shadows. The caravan will pass by and see not the shadows. The singer will strike upon the guitar, and heed them not. The women will bear jars to the near-by well and know them not. Yet there is one who will heed the shadows. Aye, the slayer of the dead!—*Kirghiz proverb.*

THE snow ceased not long after dawn, leaving its carpet over the breast of the Jhilam hills and its tracery upon the laden branches of the pines. With the clearing of the weather Shaista Mirza ordered the kettle-drums of the fortress to sound the muster of his forces.

The riders assembled in the snow-covered gardens—Persians in elaborate armor, Pathan mercenaries in cloak and hood, lean Hazaras in quilted corselets with quivers slung at the saddles.

The Mirza inspected his men with care to see that they were well armed and mounted. It was well, he thought, to make a good showing of force before Kargan Khan.

He was mounted on a beautiful Arab, his thin body wrapped in furs that covered all

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but his sharp face. Nureddin accompanied him, a handsome figure with jeweled saddle-peak and sword-belt.

Only a small force was left with the slaves in the fortress. Shaista Mirza completed his muster. He selected a group of heavily armed Persians—among them a few musket-men—as body-guard for himself. Others he told off under Nureddin to escort Rao Singh and the master of physics, who was muffled in his soiled white cloak because of his recent malady.

The Pathan mercenaries Shaista Mirza placed in the vanguard, and he threw out two flanking parties of Hazara archers. In this manner they set out along the Jhilam road around the lake, leaving only slaves, servants and a few soldiers under a Persian captain to guard the castle. On that day the Mirza's riders numbered twenty-five score.

They rode through the village, flinging gibes at the few emaciated women who with children clinging to their shawls came to look impassively at the cavalcade. The men of the village were not to be seen.

Along the lake-shore the huts of the fishermen were empty, so the sharpeyed vizier whose duty was to assess the taxes noted. Here the road wound into the pines.

The sun was high by now, giving out a cheering warmth. The riders, now that the early-morning chill had been shaken from their limbs, laughed and sang snatches of ballads, restraining their fresh horses with difficulty. Shaista Mirza smiled and plucked at his cheeks. He was treading the path of his destiny, and his plans were well laid.

Rao Singh, his arms bound behind him, rode with head downcast, saying nothing and only looking up at intervals to stare at the thickets that bordered the road. He paid no heed to the witticisms of Nureddin, who was in a high good humor.

Then Khlit rode into the path ahead of the vanguard.

A shout went up from the Hazaras, a shout which was repeated back until it reached Shaista Mirza.

"Let the archers pursue!" he cried shrilly. "Yet not more than a ten—all others keep to their files."

The black horse wheeled under spur as the nearest Hazaras urged their mounts forward. Khlit waved his arm as if making a sign to some one hidden from view. He bent low in the saddle, for the archers had sped a few haphazard shafts, and gave the black horse its head.

Rao Singh had raised his head dully at the shout, but seemed not to grasp its meaning.

"Eh, the wolf is seen by the pack, Bember Hakim," chuckled the astrologer. "The stars are kind to Shaista Mirza."

"Nay, 'tis a shrewd wolf," muttered the other, "and Jaffar sleeps with the fish for bedfellows."

Nureddin shrugged his plump shoulders, yawned and glanced appraisingly at Rao Singh.

"Gave you the youth opium?" he whispered.

"He is made ready for what is to come. See, where he reels in his saddle."

Khlit rode well ahead of the pursuers, keeping beyond bow-shot. His horse was fresh and had the legs of the others. Little by little he increased his lead, turning easily in the saddle to measure the distance.

He had lost sight of the main body of his enemies. He rose in his stirrups, plucking his curved sword from its scabbard and swinging it around his head, feeling the exhilaration of being again in the saddle and tasting the keen delight of peril.

Yet as he did so—obeying one of the instincts that were his heritage from his Cossack forebears—he sheathed his weapon and crouched forward watchfully. In the snow before him he had seen the tracks of many horses.

Into the broad trail left by these riders he urged his own mount, and a cry went back from the speeding archers to the men around Shaista Mirza.

"The outcast has turned into the Wular *davan*."

The Persian laughed, then scowled and snapped an order angirly.

"Summon back the archers! Form in close files."

He was wary of riding haphazard into the valley where the men of Kargan Khan were waiting. And he knew that Khlit once in the *davan* was between his own men and the Kirghiz and could not escape without leaving his horse and climbing the slope—a course of action that would leave him afoot and consequently an easy prey.

Shaista Mirza was willing to believe that sheer good fortune had thrown the Cossack before his men. Yet his suspicions were sharp and he had heard how Khlit had once

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led two bands of soldiers into conflict with each other by just such a trick. He knew his own strength and the weapons he could employ to sway the mind of Kargan, and he could afford to be cautious.

"Perchance the outcast thought to bait a trap," he muttered to the leader of his musket men. "If so he must be without hope, for he has ridden ahead of us into the *davan*."

It occurred to Shaista Mirza that Khlit might have hoped that Rao Singh could escape in the excitement that arose on his appearance. But the Hindu was in his place, leaning heavily on the peak of his saddle.

"If we find the Cossack in the *davan*," he called to Nureddin, "make no move to seize him until I command."

Whereupon he set his men in motion in orderly ranks, close knit now that they ascended the slope that led from the lake-shore to the *davan*.

Meanwhile Khlit had not slackened the pace of his horse. The way was familiar, and those who had gone before him had trampled the snow-crust into a compact footing.

He passed two sentinels—bearded men mounted on shaggy steppe ponies—without pause, only shouting the name of Kargan Khan. The two, seeing that he was alone, permitted him to ride on.

Now he saw slender blue spirals of smoke rising from the head of the valley and caught the stamp of horses' hoofs and the jangle of bits. Rounding the turn where he had once passed the form of Cheker Ghar, he came full upon the Kirghiz.

They filled the valley-head from cliff to cliff, squatting in circles around the fires, yet with their horses' bridles near at hand and their weapons across their knees—stalwart men roughly clad in furs and horse-hide boots, their broad faces set with slant eyes that turned inquiringly upon Khlit.

The Kirghiz had come in peace to the Wular; still the tribesmen had no love for the mercenaries of Jhilam and they trusted no man's word—save only Kargan Khan's.

And Khlit reined in sharply, beholding one who sat upon a stone and watched him under shaggy brows. It was a man whose heavy head seemed sunk into massive shoulders; whose bent and mightily thewed frame was enclosed in a supple corselet of Turkish mail without the customary *khalat*.

A bronzed and hairy hand gripped each knee of the sitter, and Khlit saw that one eye was closed beneath a vivid scar that ran from chin to brow. By this Khlit knew that he faced Kargan, chief of the Baramula horde.

But already he had seen where the rocks over the grave had been rolled aside and the earth upturned. The *khalat* of the khan lay on the snow before him, and under the *khalat* the outline of a slender figure.

Thus did Khlit ride to meet Kargan Khan on the day that gave to the Wular valley the name of Kizil Yar, or Red Pass, in the tongue of the Kirghiz.

He lifted his right hand to show that he held no weapon and walked his horse forward slowly. The warriors on either side of the khan observed him intently but made no hostile move.

"Dismount!" cried one gruffly.

Khlit made no move to do so.

"Shall a kha khan dismount before a khan, even the chief of a horde?" he asked, speaking directly to Kargan. "I am Khlit, called by some the Curved Saber, and once the yak-tail standard of the Jun-gar horde followed me."

A murmur went through the assembled warriors at this. The southern Kirghiz had never seen Khlit, but his name was known by hearsay. Many tales concerning the Coassack had been repeated throughout the nomad tribes.

Kargan Khan's harsh face showed no indication of his thoughts.

"What seek you, Khlit?"

"I ride to Kargan Khan with a message. Behind me, in the space milk takes to boil, will come the slayer of Kera."

The muscles under the jaw of the Kirghiz tightened and the skin of his face darkened.

"It is well," he rumbled, the words rolling from his thick chest—the only sign of his emotion. "For I have come in the pursuit of blood. I have looked upon the dead body of Kera."

SHAISTA MIRZA took in the scene at the valley-head with a swift glance. He sought out Khlit, noting his position a few yards from and slightly back of Kargan Khan.

He saw that the Kirghiz had mounted but were not formed in any order. They sat silently on their wearied ponies, staring at the gaudily attired Persians. Shaista

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Mirza reflected smilingly that they resembled a pack of wolves.

Whether Khlit was Kargan's prisoner or not Shaista Mirza could not guess. He considered it a stroke of rare good fortune that Khlit should have walked into the trap. Perhaps, he reasoned swiftly, the Cossack planned to denounce him—Shaista Mirza.

For this Shaista Mirza was prepared. Hidden among his followers, he reflected, were Rao Singh and Bember Hakim, whose testimony united to his own would overbear anything the solitary outcast might say.

So Shaista Mirza smiled and bent his head slightly in greeting to the khan.

"Hail, Kargan Khan," he began smoothly, "master of the Baramula and lord of the Kara Kirghiz. Auspicious is the day we can meet in friendship. Favorable are the omens for this day, and fain would Jahangir himself have been present to greet the chieftain he holds in honor."

He paused for a response, but Kargan Khan spoke not. The single eye of the Kirghiz roved over the Persian ranks as if seeking that which he found not.

"Happy am I, Kargan Khan, to bid you and your followers welcome to Jhilam, and to the castle."

Shaista Mirza's courteous words thinly veiled the scorn in which he held the clumsy figure on the rock. His glance wandered to the *khalat* and the form beneath it, and wavered. Then he summoned a ready smile.

"Think not, Kargan Khan, because I sent a single man to your encampment that I am unmindful of the honor due the Lord of the Baramula. Nay, Bember Hakim is the trusted servant of the Mogul himself, and a worthy messenger."

The Kirghiz lifted his shaggy head impatiently.

"Aye," he responded, "the *hakim* swore that when I rode to this spot I would set hand on the slayer of my child. Name the man!"

The last words echoed forth as if torn from the muscles of the warrior's chest.

Shaista Mirza bent his head and glanced sidelong at Khlit. The Cossack sat his horse impassively, apparently indifferent to what was said. He also was scanning the Persian ranks.

In spite of himself the Mirza wondered at the outcast's calm. He reflected that Khlit must be in truth dull of wit and not as the tales had painted him. Once Kargan Khan heard Shaista Mirza speak the name of Khlit, the Cossack would die as swiftly and mercilessly as a cornered roe deer is torn by dogs.

Wherefore Shaista Mirza smiled—a smile that ended in a sneer. He liked well to play with a victim, to tie slowly the knot of death upon the condemned.

Truly, he would have preferred to see a woman die rather than the gray-haired warrior. He regretted that he had not seen Jaffar deal with Kera. It would have been a dainty sight.

"My heart is heavy with your sorrow, O khan," he lisped. "And I have come prepared to see vengeance done. Aye, to see the end of the pursuit of blood. Yet you are a chief and a judge.

"Behold then, I would have the matter clear and purged of the cloud of doubt, so that none may whisper Kargan Khan slew wrongly."

He turned in his saddle.

"Nureddin!"

The astrologer pushed forward.

"Fetch Rao Singh and Bember Hakim."

Softly he added—

"You have made certain the stripling is heavy with opium?"

"Aye, my lord. These past six hours has Bember Hakim been plying him with noxious physics and nostrums, so that he knows not his right hand from his left."

Satisfied, Shaista Mirza watched his two witnesses dismount and advance until they stood beside the *khalat*. Rao Singh, whose arms had been freed, stumbled, and was supported by the other. Khlit was watching not Rao Singh but the face of Kargan.

By now the sun was well down behind the mountain peaks and the shadows were gathering under the pines. Sometimes the shadows shifted as if wind had moved the pine-branches. But there was no wind.

From a cleft in the rock—the same as that by which Bember Hakim had made his escape—yellow rays of the sun shot across the ravine, falling athwart the figure of Rao Singh.

Kargan Khan had gripped his weapon spasmodically as the boy stood before him, wondering if the Hindu who had carried Kera from the seraglio was the one he sought.

Rao Singh looked up, and father and

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lover of Kera stared long into each other's eyes. Then the boy's drooping figure straightened and he flung back his head, crossing his arms on his chest.

Nureddin frowned, for he could see that a change had come over the face of Rao Singh. The lips had drawn firmly together. Suffering had wiped out the lines of youthful indolence. The eyes were level and purposeful.

Into the face of Rao Singh had come the stamp of grief and the strength that changes boy to man. Nureddin moved uneasily and would have spoken, but Rao Singh was before him.

"Kargan Khan," he said slowly, "the Flower of the Hills was my bride. Aye, she was the rose that made fragrant the garden of my heart. And she called me lord."

In the dark eyes of the Hindu shone a steadfast purpose. Kargan Khan stared at him with fierce intentness, his savage anger challenging the pride of the Hindu.

Shaista Mirza had not thought to find Rao Singh master of his senses and would have spoken, but the Kirghiz motioned him aside without taking his gaze from the Hindu.

"You feared to ride to me—Kargan—with Kera upon your saddle-peak."

"Nay," retorted the Hindu proudly; "that I could not do until Kera was mistress of Jhilam as was Rani Begum, my mother."

Long and steadily the Kirghiz measured Rao Singh, and a new gleam crept into his single eye.

"By the gods—name me the slayer of my child!" he roared, whipping out his sword.

Shaista Mirza put out his hands, then licked his dry lips softly, studying his prisoner craftily—as a man who scans the dice he is about to cast.

Rao Singh wheeled and pointed.

"Shaista Mirza," he said.

A RISING mutter of anger from the ranks of the Kirghiz—a quick flash of weapons—ponies capered under the spur—an exclamation from the Persians—and Kargan Khan sprang to his feet. Then Shaista Mirza lifted his hand. Except for a quick spasm his face showed nothing of the rage he felt.

"Stay," he cried harshly, his high voice rising over the tumult. "Would you listen to one who speaks in the stupor of opium? Rao Singh has partaken of the drug. He knows not what he is saying."

The Persian would have urged his horse upon Rao Singh, but the Hindu leaped back and the Kirghiz interposed his bulk between them. The sword that the chief held was a heavy blade, but it trembled with the force of his anger and the strength that held the anger in check.

Khlit had not moved. Nor did he seem surprized by the speech of the boy.

"Nay, Kargan Khan," pursued Shaista Mirza swiftly; "is not Rao Singh my foe? Did he not seize your child? His false lips frame lies."

He clutched the khan's massive shoulder and whispered:

"Yonder sits the scoundrel. Aye, Khlit—he of the Curved Saber—is the man you seek!"

The Kirghiz shook his head angrily like the buffalo that Shaista Mirza was fond of calling him.

"Death of the gods!" he cried. "Would the slayer of Kera ride alone into my array?"

Then for the first time Shaista Mirza felt the chill of doubt, and paled. His voice broke as he called for Bember Hakim.

"Aye," said Khlit.

This was the only time he spoke during the judgment in the Wular *davan*.

"Let us hear Bember Hakim."

"Bember Hakim is the man of the Mogul," shrilled Shaista Mirza. "He is the faithful servant of Jahangir. His words are as the pearls of truth, for he saw the death in this valley——"

"He will say that Rao Singh is in a stupor," cried Nureddin.

"Let him speak!" growled the khan.

The wizened figure in the white cloak fell on its knees before the Kirghiz.

"Rao Singh spoke not the truth," he cried.

Shaista Mirza smiled while the witness crawled closer to the khan and embraced his boots.

"*Aie*," chanted the figure at the feet of Kargan Khan, "I have seen what I have seen. I saw the fair head of the Flower of the Hills sink in death under the sword of the miserable Jaffar. I have heard Shaista Mirza boast that he ordered the death.

"*Aie!* My spirit is parched with the thirst of vengeance. Jaffar is slain. But Shaista Mirza lives——"

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The pale face of Shaista Mirza flushed and his eyes widened.

"Traitor! False to your bread——"

Shaista Mirza struck at the prostrate form with his dagger, realizing that the man had betrayed him and understanding now why Rao Singh, who had been placed in his care, was free from opium. The Persian's dark brow was rife with hatred and fear as he thought how Bember Hakim must have fallen in with Khlit at the Baramula trail on his quest to Kargan Khan. Kargan Khan read this swiftly.

The next instant Shaista Mirza reined back sharply among his bodyguard, who had pressed forward. For Kargan Khan had bounded upon him and struck down a shield that was interposed. His second blow felled the holder of the shield to earth and he sprang after the Persian, slashing at the spears of the riders who sought to ward him off and bellowing his war-cry.

AND after Kargan came Rao Singh, who had snatched up the weapon of the felled rider. And upon his heels came the mass of the Kirghiz, fearful for their chief.

In an instant the valley resounded with the clash of steel, the frenzied snorts of horses and the cry of the injured.

The Kirghiz had attacked with fury, led by Kargan, who had mounted. In the confined space was no room for maneuvering or for the use of arrows. The compact bands of horsemen made one struggling mass, where knee pressed knee and shield clashed against shield.

Khlit had set spurs to his horse and forced his way into the center of the ranks. He found Rao Singh and drew the Hindu away from the Persian files, protesting.

"Have you forgotten?" the Cossack cried sternly. "There are those who await your coming."

At that Rao Singh had turned and sped to the cleft in the slope where he disappeared behind the rocks.

One other man had parted from the battle. Nureddin after a glance around had wheeled his horse and slipped back through the array of the Persians. Once clear of the valley he set out swiftly down the Jhilam road.

Kargan Khan had flung himself into battle with the sole thought of finding and striking down the Mirza. His men had attacked readily, savagely, but without plan or formation.

The Persian's forces had given back at first; then closed in with the armored horsemen in front. Shaista Mirza, safe behind the cordon of his men, directed the fight craftily.

In the narrow quarters the Kirghiz could not employ their favorite tactics of enveloping their foe, and were forced to fight hand to hand. They had little armor, and their horses were wearied. The fury of their first onset waned, and they split up into knots of horsemen, wheeling and plunging at superior numbers.

All this Khlit noticed, and frowned.

Then that for which he watched came to pass. Down the cleft in the ravine, down the rock-slope, even down the cliff itself, swarmed dark figures chattering with eagerness and bearing knives, rusted spears, clubs or stones. And at their head was Rao Singh.

They raced behind the Hindu brandishing their makeshift weapons, and fell upon the flanks and rear of the Persians.

Thus did Rao Singh put himself at the head of the forest men of Jhilam even as his father Sattar Singh had done before him, though under different circumstances.

The Kashmiris were unskilled warriors but they had the agility of their kind, and their anger against the Persians was a great anger. With their coming the Kirghiz pressed in, raising their war-cry anew. Khlit could see the broad figure of Kargan Khan at their head, his weapon flashing.

"Hey," he meditated, "it is a good fight. Yet it is the fight of Rao Singh and Kargan Khan."

He fingered his sword, swearing anxiously. Never before had he been a spectator of a battle. Then he sheathed his sword and sighed.

The fight—the first phase of it—was over. The Persians, their ranks broken, were streaming back toward the valley-entrance. By their flanks, clutching and stabbing, went the Kashmiris, and in their rear the Kirghiz struck down the fleeing riders. Half of Shaista Mirza's men lay in the *davan*.

Khlit, galloping among the Kirghiz, caught up with Kargan Khan at the edge of the lake. Twilight had fallen, and the cries of the stricken mercenaries were growing fainter down the Jhilam road.

Kargan Khan with a band of his men had

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halted to stare at a red glow on the lake. In the dusk it flickered from the surface of the water.

"'Tis witchcraft!" muttered Kargan Khan.

"Nay," laughed Khlit, "'tis but the pleasure island of Shaista Mirza gone up in flames after the visit of the fisher-folk. The villagers have attacked the castle and overcome the scanty garrison."

"Praise be to the gods!"

Kargan Khan looked at Khlit curiously.

"Nay, did you plan this rising of the Kashmiris? It served us well."

"Rao Singh leads them," said Khlit, and was silent.

Then he laughed.

"Nureddin—I saw the rascal flee—will be well greeted at the castle. And those of Shaista Mirza who reach there will fare little better."

While he trotted beside the Kirghiz after the fugitives Kargan Khan looked at Khlit long, wondering how much Khlit had foreknown of what came to pass at the Kizil Yar.

There were few of the Persians who escaped from Jhilam that night, and Shaista Mirza was not among them. And that night Rao Singh took the chair of his father in the council-hall of Jhilam.

CONCERNING Bember Hakim there is a strange tale. A forest man of Jhilam tells the tale. It was the day after the battle, at dawn, and he saw Khlit and Bember Hakim go into the forest along the Baramula trail.

Being curious, the man followed. He saw the two come to a heap of stones that seemed to mark a grave. There, so says the Kashmiri, Bember Hakim threw off his cloak, tunic and sandals and washed some stains from his face with snow.

Then—such is the tale—Bember Hakim rewound his turban in a different fashion and took from the rocks a green cloak and other garments, which he put on, shouldering also a heavy leopardskin pack.

Thus Bember Hakim the Arab physician became in the eyes of the Kashmiri Cheker Ghar, the conjurer and mimic—Cheker Ghar, who pressed Khlit's hand to his forehead and departed to the south, while Khlit rode alone to the north.

This tale of the Kashmiri was adjudged a lie by those who heard. For how could one man be like to two?

Doubtless, said those who heard, the Kashmiri had partaken of the good wine of Shiraz, for that night there had been great feasting in Jhilam, and much rejoicing among the men of Jhilam.

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TOO MUCH TERRITORY

STANLEY R. HOFFLUND

AT ONE minute before three o'clock on a midweek afternoon in July a stranger walked into the Acacia Park Bank. He stepped in briskly, and as he entered he looked at his watch, then compared it with a large clock on the wall. The comparison seemed to satisfy the stranger; watch and clock alike registered one minute to three.

The stranger believed that this bank would close at three o'clock, as most banks do on all days but Saturday. He did not know that the Acacia Park Bank remained open until three-thirty on the tenth day of every month, a sort of local banking custom established by Job Preston, the bank's cashier, to accomodate his best customer.

The stranger's failure to acquaint himself with this slight deviation from customary bank procedure was his only slip in a well-thought-out plan he had in mind.

He was a man of medium height and slender build. He was neatly dressed in a suit of washable material, such as are commonly worn in Summer-time in the Southern States. Thousands of men of medium height and slender build were wearing suits so nearly like his that he could not have picked his own out of the pile of them had he been confronted with the task. It would therefore have been very difficult to identify the stranger by his suit.

He wore a broad Panama hat, one of thousands of the same quality and shape. Its brim was pulled well down over the stranger's eyes, as if to give them all possible shelter from the glaring sun. Perhaps his eyes were weak; he wore large goggles of smoked glass with shell rims. Hat and goggles, between them, almost concealed the upper part of his face.

The lower part was covered by a scrubby mustache and beard, young in growth and rather messy, as such facial ornaments are when immature. But they seemed as well trimmed and tended as their age permitted. Shaving them off would have been an easy and quick way to change the stranger's appearance.

How could Job Preston, the cashier, have guessed the real business of this stranger? Job was a respectable business man and banker, a most prosperous and respected citizen of Acacia Park, the most prosperous and respectable suburb of his city.

He gave respectability in return for the respectability he expected of his customers. Respectability was Job's custom, as important in his banker's eyes as promptness.

And custom had it that the Acacia Park Bank should always be a quiet, dignified establishment, a safe place for safe people, an institution far removed from anything undignified or violent or criminal.

Who would have dreamed that on this

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peaceful afternoon the custom and respectability of Job Preston and Acacia Park were to be shattered, jarred, shocked to very foundations by a bold, wicked bank robbery?

Undoubtedly the stranger himself was the only human being who had ever experienced such a dream. And now he was there to make his dream come true.

Just a few days before, the stranger had said persuasively to a young man known in certain circles as "Canary"—playfully so dubbed because he was suspected of being "yellow"—that robbing the Acacia Park Bank in broad daylight would be as easy as sticking up a conscientious objectors' convention on a desert island. That was when he was persuading Canary to join him in the undertaking.

"It'll be a gift, a pipe, Canary," he had insisted.

Canary had been stubbornly dubious; for as a bank robber Canary did not even pretend to be a brave man. It was as an automobile driver that he could pride himself upon absolute fearlessness, to say nothing of an almost uncanny ability at tuning motors so they would attain more speed than other motors. That was why he had been selected as a partner from so many prospective ones by "Slim" Gunther, alias "Gunmetal Slim," alias a dozen other extraordinary names in as many states.

"De only trouble," Canary had protested—he had received his early education on the Bowery—"is dat dere ought to be more of youze. One guy can't stick up a bank, not all by his self.

"I'll be on hand wit' de getaway car to take youze away from dere so fast dem boobs won't know whether it was a hydroplane or a land machine youze beat it in; but youze ought to have some one along to watch de door an' keep dat fat-faced cashier an' his kid teller up against de wall while youze go t'rough de vault. An' maybe an outside guy or two to watch out fer a stray bull."

"Leave it to me, Canary," Slim had insisted. "The bank will close at three, so I'll have only the two inside guys to handle. They'll be so scared a baby with a cap pistol could stick 'em up.

"As for bulls, the only one on that beat spends all his time in the park, two blocks down, where them swell nursemaids go to keep the millionaires' babies from interferin' with their bridge parties."

"But fer all dat," the stubborn Canary had persisted, "youze ought to be at least twins if you're goin' to hog all dat job fer one family."

"Letting in another guy would mean reducing your share of the haul just so much more," Gunmetal Slim had argued adroitly. "What's the use of hooking up with a third party to whack up a loan that's going to be so easy to get?

"What's the sense of crabbing about my end of it anyway? I'll handle my part; all you have to do is be there on time with the car."

"Who's crabbin'?" grumbled Canary. "Didn't I say I'd be dere?"

And so it had been arranged.

WHEN the stranger, Gunmetal Slim Gunther, entered the Acacia Park Bank Job Preston, the cashier, was counting large assortments of currency on a shelf behind the teller's cage. Beside his neat piles of currency were neat stacks of gold, already counted. Besides these yellow stacks were silver ones, all ready to be done up in handy rolls with paper wrappers properly labeled.

At Job's side stood Herbert Williams, the bank's youthful teller, also counting money, Back of them, in the wall, could be seen the heavy, round door of the vault, swung invitingly wide open.

No precedent had been established to warn Job Preston that he should not keep his vault conveniently open during business hours; Acacia Park had heretofore been unquestionably trustworthy in the daytime. Behind the dark goggles of the man who was bent upon establishing such a precedent a pair of cool, calculating eyes took in the setting for his performance with great satisfaction.

"Made to order," he commented mentally.

Job Preston glanced up with a businesslike expression as the stranger approached the counter. A new customer, he thought; perhaps a new citizen of Acacia Park. He had never seen the man before.

"What can I do for you?" Job inquired, hoping he could open up a nice new account, a large one. The stranger dressed and carried himself prosperously.

Slim smiled the gentlemanly smile for which he was famous among those intimates of his who graced the top of his profession.

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Then he glanced at the clock upon the wall.

It was three o'clock, the time when most banks close, but half an hour too early for Job Preston's bank to shut its doors on the tenth day of the month, the last day when water-bills would be discounted to consumers by the Acacia Park Water Company, the bank's largest customer. Today the invariable rush of last-minute discount savers would necessitate a late deposit by the water company.

Slim mistakenly expected that immediately some one, the young teller, perhaps, would start closing and barring for the day. It was very unlikely, Slim thought, that any customer would enter before the door was fastened.

His mind erroneously satisfied upon this important point, Slim in leisurely fashion extracted from a side-pocket of his coat a small gunmetal automatic pistol. This he pointed with cool precision at Job Preston's rather corpulent stomach, the muzzle within three feet of an easy target.

Not a hurried move did Slim make; he was not one-thousandth part as excited as Job Preston appeared to be. He prided himself, did Slim, upon perfect stage presence when he put on his thrilling acts. Practised finish as a high-class crook had ever been his boast among intimates.

"I came to secure a loan," he said so quietly and casually that Herbert Williams, the teller, who had turned away to consult a large ledger when he saw that Job Preston was going to attend the visitor's wants, went right ahead with his work as if nothing out of the ordinary run of respectable business were occurring five feet behind his back.

Job Preston must have heard the man's words, but it was the pistol that seized all his attention. Job had never had a pistol pointed at that part of him before; his heart and stomach were now establishing a precedent.

His mouth opened from astonishment; for a second his eyes widened from fear. But promptly he grasped the situation, and his face achieved something which proclaimed Job an inherently brave man. It assumed a stern expression.

"Game sort of an old codger," Slim thought. "But it will be a cinch for an expert like me to tame him. I could take care of a dozen of his kind."

"What do you mean by this?" Job demanded vigorously.

"I mean that any noise or disturbance from you will make it necessary for me to shoot you," said Slim with a quiet cocksureness which carried a wonderful amount of wicked intent. "And that goes for your teller there, too," Slim added.

Herbert Williams turned at the threat, an unheard-of sort of statement to be made in the Acacia Park Bank. He found himself confronting the pistol, which Slim swerved to greet him.

The young teller's astonishment lasted longer than Job Preston's.

"Hold that expression, young man; and don't get peevish if what I'm doing annoys you," said Slim dryly. "I can assure both of you that I'm not here to take any chances; you either keep quiet and do just what I tell you or you get shot!"

For some reason Herbert's eyes became a trifle bloodshot as they sought those of his employer. Perhaps the young man was angry. Very apparently he was no coward.

"Well, what do you think of that!" was all he had to say.

"I think it's a dirty outrage!" Job Preston exploded, his face flushing.

He glanced worriedly at the hundreds of dollars on the counter, and his mind's eye secretly scanned the appallingly, helplessly open door of the vault behind him.

"Put your hands up in the air, both of you—straight up!" Slim commanded.

A dry, conceited smile twisted his mouth as he added:

"The money's all right; don't bother any more about it. I couldn't have stacked it neater myself. Thank you for having everything ready for me."

Job Preston muttered something beneath his dignity as cashier of such an eminently respectable institution; but he sensibly obeyed the command to put his hands above his head. So did Herbert Williams. The robber seemed very dexterous at threatening both of them at the same time with his weapon.

They further obeyed Slim—or rather obeyed the automatic—when they stepped out through the little gate in the bank's counter and stood before a wall in the main room of the building.

"Keep your hands just as they are," Slim ordered in a brisk, certain manner.

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"And don't turn around; keep your faces to that wall."

"Shall we do it, Job?" Herbert inquired.

It was truly a humiliating position for a young, red-blooded American, one who had recently chased Huns over trenches, to find himself in.

"Have to, I guess," Job growled sourly. "I've got a wife and some kids to consider. And you've got a girl, you know."

"Yes," Herbert agreed. "But"—his voice full of fight—"I don't believe he'd dare to shoot. And I know I could knock his can off in two minutes if——"

A prod in the small of his back from the pistol silenced Herbert. Job also received an admonitory prod.

"Cut out the conversation!" Slim ordered curtly.

A jingle of coins told the two victims that the robber was sweeping money from the counter into a small leather satchel he had carried when he entered, an inconspicuously neat little bag toward which Job had given but a glance. The cashier's fists clenched spasmodically in the air. But he did not lower them.

"I suppose you've got some more of your dirty gang of thugs outside," Herbert could not refrain from saying.

"Oh, no," Slim retorted casually. "I'm all alone, I assure you, except for my chauffeur. He'll be along presently with the limousine. It doesn't require much of a crew to clean out a rube bank like this."

"Well, I'll be danged!" came in a surprized gasp from Job Preston.

"I've already requested you two to shut up," said Slim arrogantly. "If I have to do it again I'll shoot the message in a way that will convince you I mean what I say. You're not dealing with a tenderfoot at this business."

Slim's smile was vain beyond description as he gave them this bit of information.

"Now then," he went on briskly, "I'll trouble you both to step ahead of me into the vault. If you use your heads and help me clean out everything in it that I want I may decide not to lock you in when I'm through. Is there any sort of air-hole into it?"

"No," said Job gravely. "We'd suffocate there."

"I'll lock you in that closet in the office then," Slim offered with cunning persuasiveness. "That is, I'll be white with you if you are with me.

"I want all the cash and currency in that vault; no bonds or securities of any kind. Do I get what I'm after?"

"Yes," Job replied without hesitation. "Temporarily," he added with meaning.

A new note of hope had come into his voice.

"Temporarily your grandmother! This will be the longest time loan you ever made. Step lively, now—but first you'd better lock the front door. It's long past closing time."

Was there a note of triumph, of anticipated revenge in Job Preston's voice when he said:

"Young man, you've chosen the wrong day. We don't close until three-thirty on the tenth of the month."

The statement seemed to startle Gunmetal Slim Gunther out of the easy manner he had assumed in conducting this single-handed raid. Had he made a slip in his planning of this job? Impossible! He had never slipped before.

"You don't mean to say—" he started; but his answer came through the front door, the one he had ordered locked. Samuel Jones, a prosperous grocer from across the street, stepped into the bank. In one pudgy hand Samuel bore a cloth coin-sack; in the other a sheaf of checks and currency protruded from his pass-book.

"Well, that calls for a new deal all round!" Slim almost exclaimed aloud. For a second his mind approached as close to panic as it ever had during his criminal career.

BUT he was a resourceful man, was Slim. And there was something in this situation that instantly appealed to his sense of humor and his inordinate vanity. Humor and vanity were very closely allied in Slim's makeup.

Wouldn't it create an unprecedented sensation when his own circle of the criminal four hundred heard of this wholesale hold-up he was staging! He would be the most talked-of, most envied crook in all the world!

"Come right in, customer," Slim hospitably invited the grocer. "Just drop your deposit in that little satchel there on the floor.

"No use putting it in the vault; we're about to move the vault. Now join your friends in the hands-up corner."

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It was not Slim's bantering words which caused the protesting grocer to obey; the automatic pistol which threatened to puncture him at close range was the clincher. When a conscienceless man with one of those things to back him up said, "Shut up!" Jones, plucky citizen of a free country though he was, could not find it in him to disobey. With an outraged expression of countenance he dropped his day's deposits into the satchel and then lined up facing the wall beside Job Preston.

"The bank will see to it, Jones," Job consoled, "that you are repaid every cent you lose through this piece of outlawry. We're protected by the association, and—"vengefully—"it won't be many days before we have the money back and this crook behind the bars where he belongs."

Slim laughed, but the approach of two men from across the street outside, plainly discernible through the window, caused a note which he would rather have withheld to enter the laugh. He was instantly sorry; the laugh had lacked conviction. But he managed to retort in his best facetious vein.

"Don't you believe a word of it, Jonesy," he advised. "This coin of yours is going to be put into a long-time investment where it will be safe from ten per cent. bank sharps, who would pollute the jails if they were sent where they belong."

At this juncture one of the two men whose approach had bothered Slim entered the bank, the other passing on down the street. An unusually bulky coin-sack and a bumper sheaf of currency instantly diverted Slim's mind from thoughts of locking the door, a step he had felt must be immediately taken.

His eyes narrowed greedily as they took in the big deposit of the cashier of the water company, who had come over early with a portion of his discount-day receipts. Slim greeted him facetiously, but now a certain amount of resentment was distinguishable in his voice and manner.

"Greetings," he said, carelessly waving his pistol toward the arrival's nose. "We've been waiting for you. In future come before three; we've decided to cut out these scab hours."

Was it Job Preston who chuckled from among the victims at the wall?

A motor's rumbling outside announced the arrival of Canary, Slim's assistant, with the "getaway car." Slim stole a glance through the window and saw a scared face behind the wheel of the powerful machine which was to whirl him away to safety—if such a port exists for criminals.

"The baby!" Slim thought with contempt in which an uncomfortable amount of apprehension existed. "That face of his would be enough to tip off any passing cop that something is wrong. I better get to that vault right away and then beat it. Canary doesn't look as though he'd wait for me long."

Because of its shady interior and a row of potted palms along its front windows it was impossible to see distinctly into the bank from outside. This feature had strongly appealed to Slim when he laid his plans for the robbery.

But Canary was doing his best to penetrate the gloomy interior; his shifty eyes were straining to fathom the inside state of affairs. He glanced at his watch, his hand shaking.

It was a quarter past three, the time appointed for Slim to appear from the bank with his plunder and fly away with him to a more desirable locality. Canary slowed his motor with the throttle; he would not have shut it off completely for worlds.

"Wonder who dat guy was," he thought worriedly; for Canary had observed the entrance of the water company's cashier into the bank. "And what right has Slim got wit' de door unlocked at dis time of day? He's a —— of a banker!"

The water-company employee was quickly lined up beside the other victims at the wall, minus his valuable deposit. A highly nervous man, he had been too alarmed to protest even feebly. For which Slim was truly thankful.

But no sooner was this easy victim in position than two more depositors stepped briskly into the bank.

Their arrival and unchecked entry into the building created a panic in the mind of Canary, outside in the waiting car.

"What's de sense of all dis?" he asked himself despairingly. "What does Slim mean by keepin' dem doors unlocked? Does de big bull-t'rower t'ink he can stick up de whole town by hisself? What's comin' off here!"

From that moment Canary was an irresponsible assistant, an entirely undependable man for a bank robber to rely upon.

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Slim sensed the fact, read it with worried, hasty, preoccupied glances he stole at the pasty face out there in the waiting car.

This was bad for Slim's vaunted coolness and nerve. He needed Canary badly; never had legs as vehicles for quick transportation seemed so inadequate to Gunmetal Slim Gunther.

But the vault, where the big treasure lay, was still untouched!

Slim greeted the two arrivals with commendable assumption of coolness considering his true state of mind. It required a huge effort on his part to restrain a wild impulse to dash past them and flee to safety with Canary. But not until that trustingly open vault was ransacked would Slim quit.

"Canary's just got to wait!" he thought fiercely. "The yellow little shrimp wouldn't dare beat it without me."

But there was little sound comfort for Slim in denying that such a disastrous contingency existed.

"Step lively, gents!" he ordered, his tone brisk with eagerness to terminate these petty hold-ups and be off upon the big venture in the vault.

"None of that, Jones!" he growled when the stout grocer risked a glance away from the wall. "You stick where I put you. Don't think for a minute that just because these gentlemen demand my hospitality temporarily my attention is not on you too. I could pop off a dozen of you with this little automatic. You'd think you were up against a machine-gun nest.

"Just drop your contributions into that satchel, brothers, and then line up against the wall with the others. That's the idea. Your discipline is splendid. Now all of you turn to the left and march in single file to the vault. Keep your hands——"

Slim almost groaned aloud when another depositor entered just as he was about to bolt the door preparatory to launching his advance in force against the vault. Slim saw Canary, outside in the car, produce a handkerchief, with which he mopped a veritable flood of perspiration from his agonized brow.

This one was a woman, a middle-aged person who had the stamp of spinsterhood indelibly written upon her. She would have screamed had not Slim quick-wittedly seized her wrist and thrown her violently into a corner, so violently she choked and could not scream.

It hurt Slim to be forced to handle a lady roughly; nothing professionally high-toned about that. He hoped the press would overlook such an undignified occurrence in reporting the affair.

"You unspeakable coward!" said one of the four victims against the wall.

Slim would have punished the speaker, but he could not locate the voice. One can not murder four men to avenge the insult of one.

But he almost murdered Job Preston when he observed that the cashier's sides were shaking with checked convulsions of laughter. There was something about Job's manner of conducting himself as a victim which made Slim furious. But it also made him dubious, which was terribly hard on his already overtaxed nerves.

THE noise of a suddenly accelerated motor outside caused Slim's heart to leap out of position sickeningly. But the machine did not leave as he dreaded; Canary was merely giving vent to pent-up impatience—signaling perhaps. He kept the motor running so fast that the smoke from his exhaust must be attracting attention blocks away.

"Why in —— did I ever choose that pinhead for a pal in a big job like this!" Slim thought distractedly.

But he would not forsake the vault, not until he had robbed it. Even under his present torture of apprehension Slim resolved to see the thing through. Never would it be said in his own underworld that Gunmetal Slim Gunther ran away from an open vault because of cold feet. His reputation was at stake.

Before he could herd his victims, whose ranks were now swelled to seven, into the vault—before he could even lock the door preparatory to taking such a step, three more bank customers, pass-books and coin-bags in hand, approached the bank's entrance.

A groan of real dismay, unsuppressable, escaped between the lips of Gunmetal Slim Gunther. But his despair turned to fury when a snort of mirth escaped from Job Preston.

"Thought you wanted us to help you clean out the vault," Job remarked with brazen disregard for orders to be silent.

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"Seems to me there are enough of us here now to do the job satisfactorily—unless you plan to remove the bricks and cement and everything. Why wait for more willing helpers?"

"You think you're mighty funny, don't you, you big, fat ——"

But the entry of the three latest arrivals cut short any rough words or actions Slim had in mind. Three victims at a time made him a very busy robber indeed.

The arrival of victims by squad must have had a weird effect upon Canary, judging by his actions. Casting secrecy and regard for appearances to the winds, he pressed desperately with his thumb upon the button which controlled the siren of the "getaway car," an unusually noisy and disturbing contrivance. Maybe a cramp seized Canary's thumb; the ensuing pandemonium of noise was so prolonged that an entire suburb was made acquainted with the fact that some one wanted some one to come at once, immediately, hastily.

Slim made a desperate effort to maintain a calm front. He felt it would be fatal to permit his victims, ten of them now, to perceive how seriously his morale had deteriorated. Those victims were far too numerous to be safely handled by even a perfectly self-possessed robber.

Another chuckle from Job Preston, who was now standing with hands at his sides staring with a satisfied expression through the window, did not arouse in Slim the healthy anger such disobedience should have provoked. In fact his dazed brain only vaguely resented this breach of rules; for Slim's eyes had taken in the same scene Job was so apparently enjoying.

Beside Canary's smoking, screeching car at the curb stood a big six-foot policeman. Evidently he was upbraiding Canary; presently that cringing individual succeeded in jerking his thumb from the siren button. The sudden cessation of noise made it possible to overhear snatches of what the officer was bellowing.

"Shut off that motor! Don't you know it's against the law? You're making enough smoke for a reduction-plant, and it smells worse. Shut it off or I'll run you in!"

"Guess I'd better cut out the vault," Slim decided falteringly. "Canary'll never wait with his motor stopped. I'll have to get past that cop and beat it with Canary now while the beating is good!"

Wrathfully the policeman turned from Canary and strode toward the bank's entrance.

"The man who hires you for a chauffeur must be inside," he shouted over his shoulder. "I'll go and tell him that if he doesn't fire you I'll run him in."

"I've seen a dozen men go into this bank," he declared testily as he advanced; "but nivver a one of them has come out again. Are they holding a directors' meetin' or is it an afternoon reception they're— Holy smoke! Haven't you shut off that engine yet!"

"Yes, sir," Canary managed to gasp.

Again he slowed the engine's speed; but shut it off he could not.

"Shut off that——"

But the policeman's harsh command was lost in a sudden roar from the motor Canary controlled. Slipping the car into gear, Slim's assistant drove ahead with a mighty lurch. Once in high and on the boulevard he attained such speed as only a fool or a fugitive would dare.

"De crazy boob!" Canary chattered as he sped, referring to Slim. "Did he t'ink I'd wait while he went t'rough de whole population an' de police force too? He's tryin' to take in too much territory. Here's where I take in considerable myself!"

Gunmetal Slim Gunther acted with amazing quickness. The little satchel which contained all the loot he could now hope for, and which he would never abandon, was an impediment to speed perhaps, but its weight of gold and silver made it a dangerous weapon, an oversized billy which had a crushing effect when swung without consideration for the human frailty of its mark.

As the unfortunate policeman, blinded somewhat by his fury against Canary, entered the door he was met by something heavy, cruelly swung down upon his helmet by a fiendishly agile man of a type he had not expected to encounter in such a respectable bank. The helmet telescoped; its ruination probably saved the official skull beneath it from being permanently wrecked. He went down in a big, bulky, useless heap on the threshold.

Gunmetal Slim Gunther sprang over the prostrate body and dashed after Canary's fleeing car, now a good fifty feet down the street and just ready to be slipped into high for a speedier effort.

"Canary! Wait! Hey, you poor fish,

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slow down! I'll be with you in a second!"

But either the noise of the car's gears and bellowing exhaust, or sheer fear, made Canary deaf as a stone to frenzied hailing; he did not even slightly turn his head. His eyes and his mind were busy ahead; speed in that direction had become a fixed idea, monomania, with Canary.

The high school at Acacia Park has produced sprinters who are the suburb's idols, But those citizens on the street who witnessed Slim's pursuit of the automobile swear he made a local hundred-yard dash look like a two-mile run in the matter of speed. He almost caught the car, would have if Canary had kept it in intermediate a few seconds longer.

They say he almost overtook the three bullets he sent in rapid succession after the man whom he had selected for a partner in his undertaking, when he saw that further chase was useless and gave way to a murderous impulse. The driver of the car, it is told, ignored those bullets as stonily as he had the wild supplications to wait, including a last desperate plea while Slim was traveling better than nine flat.

"Canary! Canary — you yellow idiot! I've got your share of the swag with me!"

NINE of his victims were left far behind; but there was a tenth victim, one whose presence had troubled Slim least of all. How often has a woman ruined a man's chances in a criminal adventure!

No one attempted to interfere with Slim until his lady victim overtook him. Her pursuit since she hurdled the policeman a few paces behind him was perhaps responsible for the apparently dazed condition which seized those of Acacia Park's citizens who were spectators. This seeming paralysis of the populace was not at all relieved when the pursuing lady gathered the skirts which had handicapped her, gathered them in her arms and ran unimpeded, as a sprinter should run.

Susan Henshaw had been one of the most respectable spinsters of Acacia Park up to that moment. After it she became certainly the most respected. Who does not admire sheer pluck and grit? Regardless of skirts?

Silently she sped after the speeding Slim. He abandoned his pursuit of Canary after firing his three reckless shots. Then he paused a moment, changed his course toward the other side of the street, and sped on again toward a large automobile which stood unoccupied at the curb a half-block ahead.

Very apparently he had selected it as a conveyance to replace the one which had abandoned him. That it was the property of another did not seem to bother Slim in the least.

He heard a thin, high, piercing scream behind him, a cry of female rage unleashed, a call from a woman for vengeance. Slim turned his head to behold a sight which momentarily paralyzed his brain.

A pursuing man would have promptly received a shot from Slim's weapon; but this elderly goddess of vengeance with garb disarranged into an unmentionable sort of track suit created a weird effect upon him.

"Stop him!" Susan Henshaw shrieked. "He's robbed the bank! He's got my money! He hurt me!"

She paddled along after him with amazing speed for one of her sex and age and— costume. Could a man, any man, no matter how desperate, fire a shot toward that?

Slim gained the automobile at the curb, sprang into the driver's seat and worked rapidly with the starting device. The key had been removed from the switch by a citizen of Acacia Park of less trusting disposition than most of the community.

"Get out of my car, you thief!" screamed the high-pitched voice of his lone pursuer, now close to him.

Slim obeyed promptly, not because of the command but from lack of a key. The fastest car in the world is useless for purposes of immediate escape without a switch-key. Slim knew that. And he knew that the angry cries of a fast assembling mob, including his former victims, spelled disaster for him unless his legs alone proved sufficient against them.

He must run now, run and dodge into alleys and byways like a common pickpocket of the cheapest sort. What a humiliation for one of his standards of crookedness!

He would retain his plunder, though. All this effort and sacrifice of pride must not go entirely unrewarded. He reached back into the tonneau of Susan Henshaw's car, where he had tossed the satchel when he planned to escape in that stolen vehicle.

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He secured it, but the delay was disastrous. Susan Henshaw arrived just as Slim started to leave.

A cat-like being in a fluffy bundle of white skirts pounced upon his back, gripped his face with sharp claws, screamed piercing imprecations with a sharp voice. She would not be shaken off; she could not be shot off because, just when he became sufficiently desperate for such a deed, she bit the wrist of the hand which held the automatic pistol, so viciously that Slim let go with a howl of rage and pain. A yawning gutter treacherously swallowed his weapon.

Then Slim abandoned the satchel. With profanity unpardonable in the presence of a lady — such intimate presence! — he dropped his precious loot upon the sidewalk.

Two burdens were unsupportable, and the satchel could at least be dropped. The other would not be even shaken, though he bucked like a bronco and once rolled over upon the parkway.

Susan Henshaw came up with him, master of her beast in any of his tricks. Bewildered, Slim dashed through a hedge to brush her off. He dashed back through it again to the sidewalk. Susan Henshaw still mastered her mount.

Then some brave man in the crowd—the policeman claims the honor, having revived and awakened to the fact that business of his kind was active on the beat—tripped up the panting, almost exhausted human cayuse. Down went Slim, sprawling half over the curb, whence his frenzied buckings had taken him. The fall rendered him as totally unconscious as the policeman had been after they met at the door The curb had proven even harder on Slim's skull than his satchel had been upon that of the officer.

When he recovered consciousness the policeman was proudly gripping his shoulder and his wrists were bound together with bracelets of steel. The policeman was vainGloriously claiming all the credit for the arrest, completely ignoring a silent, blushing, rather disheveled little spinster who stood in the crowd.

In the circle of faces peering down at him Slim saw the triumphant sneer of Jones the grocer, the "I-told-you-so" grin of Job Preston, the cashier, and expressions of anger, ridicule, pity, and various emotions displayed by his other victims and their friends.

When he gazed into the eyes of the little woman who had so neatly "broken" him he read nothing but contempt, and he averted his own eyes. For men of the type of Gunmetal Slim Gunther dread contempt beyond all other manifestations of regard from fellow human beings.

Some one in the crowd asked him why he had not hailed a taxi or jumped aboard a street-car. How brutal is the mob's disregard for a sensitive burglar's feelings when the burglar is disarmed and no longer dangerous!

A bitter smile twisted the bruised features of Gunmetal Slim Gunther as he painfully arose to be guided into a patrol-wagon. In that smile though there was still a trace of his old conceit. He would at least make a grandstand finish. A high-class crook has much to consider when escape is cut off; his entire reputation among his kind may hinge upon his last sentence before being led away to jail.

Assuming a pose and expression of haughty surrender, Slim started to utter the phrase.

"Well, officer, I guess——"

A shrill voice he had become recently well acquainted with interrupted him.

"I guess you bit off a whole lot more than you could chew, young man," Susan Henshaw chirruped.

Canary, now speeding furiously far, far down the highway, might have become a firm believer in mental telepathy had he heard her add—

"You tried to take in too much territory."

And then Gunmetal Slim Gunther was boosted into the patrol-wagon amidst heartless guffaws of laughter.

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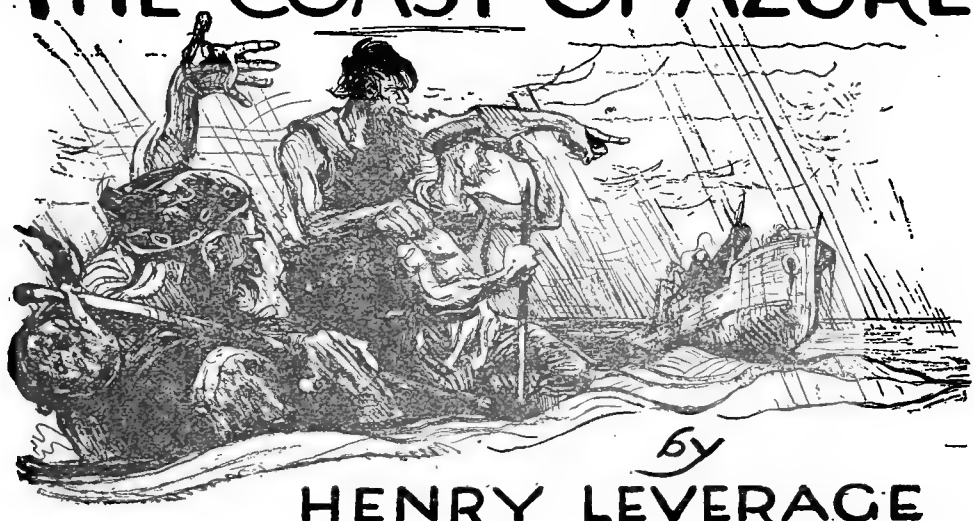
THE COAST OF AZURE



by HENRY LEVERAGE

Author of "Salvage," "Assignats," etc.

AT SAN ISOBEL, on the West Coast, it rains all the time in the rainy season and every day in the dry.

It was raining when Micky McMasters, Mike Monkey and Red Landyard were wrecked at Cape Angeles. It was still pouring down when the three seamen started up the coast in search of the harbor of Bolivar.

The American consul at San Isobel had informed the unfortunate trio that they had one chance in a thousand of finding their way through the trackless jungle that fringed the West Coast. Micky McMasters had answered for himself and his companions—

"Gol bly' me, we cawn't stay 'ere, y'know!"

The former skipper of the *Southern Star*, which was a most complete wreck on the rocks of Cape Angeles, stamped northward with ire in his heart.

He was fly-bitten, drenched, unshaven and unclothed. Red Landyard's great beard flamed outward like fire in a thicket. Mike Monkey—a man of steam and ingenuity—bore the appearance of a scrawny ape.

"Ye got me into this," he told Micky McMasters on the second day of their journey. "Ye inveigled me an' Red into this Southern Sea thing. Southern Seas, wot! They're poison!"

The skipper without a ship extracted a thorn from his leg and stared wearily at his two companions. He had not noticed it before but both men had aged ten years in as many days.

"Hit's only three 'undred kilometers to a port, Mike. We'd better be gettin' along if we sail blue seas again."

Mike Monkey leered at the cockney captain through a swollen eye. He hitched a breech-cloth higher, spat to the sand and started a Scotch tirade against Central America.

"All Ah hae left is a gee-string an' my appetite!" he declared. "Wot's th' chart say where we are?"

Red Landyard with Yankee forethought had brought with him a map from the wreck of the *Southern Star*. He sat down on the beach, brushed aside the little land crabs and traced their course since leaving San Isobel.

"We cut across this Isthmus," he said. "We bisect this cape by a jungle path—next thing we do, I guess. It's all of two hundred miles around. It's not more than fifty across. I suppose we can do it."

"Ah hae me doubts," rasped the engineer. "Wot's in th' jungles?"

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"Snakes, cougars, spiders an' blyme big vampire bats," said Mickey.

Mike Monkey gulped.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Might be a black girl or two," suggested Red Landyard. "You would make a dandy king of a cannibal tribe."

"A bloomin' idol," grinned the little captain. " 'E's th' general dimensions an' load-line of a spindle or a spar. 'E 'as only bones left, an' no muscle to 'ang on them."

THE passage through the jungle was a brooding nightmare. It consumed seven days.

The compass the trio guided themselves by was a watch-charm affair. It had never been rated. Once it pointed south. Mike Monkey grew caustic.

"A week of this an' no sign of a star. Ye both hae taken me near th' River of Doubt. Ah calculate we're in th' heart of Brazil—where th' nuts grow."

"Open water ahead," announced the Yankee mate that afternoon. "We've reached the sea!"

Mike Monkey broke into a run. He scrambled through the last fringe of the jungle. Micky McMasters followed him. The three castaways stood on a white beach and stared northward. Nothing was revealed at first save the line of green tropic foliage. No headland or mountain showed against the gray line of the sky.

A clock-bird called from an overhead frond. A green parrot winged screechingly from out of a palm. The sea, beneath the rain, was waveless. A tiny trembling agitated its surface. It stretched into a misty horizon upon which showed no sign of sail or smoke.

"We're back at the same place we started!" cried Mike Monkey. "Ah told ye that compass was defective."

"No, we're not!"

Micky McMasters's voice contained his old note of confidence.

"We're 'way up th' coast from San Isobel. We're only two 'undred kilometers from th' harbor of Bolivar."

"Twa hundred!" exclaimed Mike Monkey. "Ah hae——"

The engineer's voice died. He grasped the captain's naked shoulder with a vise-like grip. He dug his long nails in the little skipper's flesh.

"Yon's a ship!" he said. "Ye see it—there by th' stream?"

A place was in the jungle through which a sluggish creek flowed to the sea. Two sandy spits formed a short estuary. Between these points lay the rusting outlines of a small steamer which had been driven high ashore. Tropical plants and vines matted about the bow.

Micky McMasters knew a Central and South American tramp when he saw one. It flashed through the little skipper's mind that the ship had been driven ashore by the same hurricane that had wrecked the *Southern Star* on Cape Angeles, near San Isobel.

Only in this instance the catastrophe had not been a finishing one. There was enough left of the derelict to make it interesting.

The hearts of the three castaways rebounded from the trying experiences of the jungle passage. They started limping up the beach. Mike Monkey, resembling one of Darwin's antipodean savages, danced around the wreck. He pointed to a name painted on the stern—

CARMEN of Port Caliente.

"Ah like that *Carmen* part," he said. "Ye hae no scruples about going aboard, skipper?"

Micky McMasters had already rated, estimated and considered the find. The *Carmen* was no more than one hundred and fifty feet in length. She was an old tramp, built in England. Her tonnage was less than most schooners.

She had suffered severely in the storm. Her funnel lay across her deck-house. Her bridge had gone by the board. A wide crack aft the stump of the foremast extended to the keel. Sand had sifted into the holds.

No boats or life-rafts were on her deck. The davits were twisted. The jackstaff draped over a shattered fife-rail. Her paint had scaled from her plates. It hung like scabs from a monster of the deep.

Naked, swollen from insect bites, but happy in their find, the three seamen climbed aboard the *Carmen* and started an inspection. Mike Monkey dived below to the engine-room. Micky McMasters examined the deck and the shattered remains of the bridge, pilot-house and captain's cabin. Red Landyard went through the holds. He emerged by way of a gaping forehatch.

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"She was in ballast," he told the little skipper. "There's little below to interest us. I ran acrost a few cases of spoiled biscuits. We might eat them at a pinch."

"Gol bly' me, she's gutted! Her crew abandoned her off the coast. She came ashore almost alone. Maybe one man steered her in the creek. I found evidences of a hasty departure.

"Th' compass was torn from the binnacle. A weepin' thing to do."

"Th' owner's name was Don José Francisco. It's on a custom paper and a certificate pasted in th' chart-room. She's been inspected by Lloyd's in th' year 1915."

"British built, skipper?"

Micky swelled out his hairy chest with pride. He beat his fists on the bulge.

"Clyde built!" he exclaimed. "They've gone an' made a lot of changes, but she was out of England once an' she'll always be good."

Mike Monkey emerged through the slime about the engine-room companion, rubbed the muck from his eyes and leered at the skipper and the Yankee mate.

"What did you find?" asked Micky.

"Ah found a plenty. This craft has been plundered by the heathern. They took all of th' copper. They pried loose th' brass. They seized upon th' gages and dials an' indicators. Outside of that they left th' engines an' about thirty tons of choice Wellington slag—which could be used."

When an engineer suggests using coal in Central America it means for steaming purpose. The heat of the tropical world is sufficient unto itself.

Micky McMasters seized upon this spark in Mike Monkey's report.

"You mean the hengines will turn hover —with some degree of success?"

"Ah could fix them so they would revolve. Th' savages left th' working parts. They took the gadgets an' trimmings. A gage-dial don't make a marine engine go. A brass pump-rod can be replaced by an iron one. A weepin' lot of rust an' slime an' neglect can be taken care of, skipper. D'ye think I hold seven Board o' Trade certificates for nothin'? I'm a Tyneside mon, Ah am!"

Micky McMasters went over the littered deck of the tramp and stared through the forehatch opening. He moved to the rail and examined the wide crack in the steamer's plates where over a score of rivets had pulled from their places.

"She broke 'er back," he said to Red Landyard, who had followed him. "Th' keel an' keelson must be separated."

"Not exactly. I looked them over. The plates pulled with the strain. The hold-beams, ribs and deck-beams keep the ship together. She must have pounded a bit when she came ashore."

"My idea, Red, is to repair all the damage. We 'ave time enough to do anything."

"There's natives in the jungle. We'll capture a few of them. We ought to be able to save this bleedin' 'ooker for a few more passages."

"Fix her we can perhaps after a fashion," drawled the Yankee. "But how are we going to float her, skipper?"

"We'll launch 'er in th' rainy season."

MIKE MONKEY, who had tiptoed over the canted deck, gasped. He oscillated the lump in his neck. It resembled a glass ball on a jet of water. He spat bitterly.

"Ye are daft! Th' rainy season? Wot d'ye call this?"

The engineer pointed a skinny finger toward the sky, from which fell a thin drizzle.

"This," said Micky McMasters, "is considered dry in these parts. Wait until it does rain."

"Ah hae no doot ye recall we came ashore from the *Southern Star* twa weeks ago? We lay on th' beach in our nakedness for six days. In that time Ah saw th' sun once. Ah saw nae stars at all.

"Ah hae heard of th' splendor of th' southern heavens. It's a delusion! They may be there, the stars, but Ah have not been impressed."

Micky McMasters whistled cheerfully.

"I 'ave a plan," he said. "We're goin' to work. Do you think this is the place for Englishmen and Americans to lay down an' die? Do you consider who an' what we are, Mike?"

The engineer leered at the nakedness of the skipper and mate. He stared at his own scrawny, fly-bitten limbs. He raised a thin, unshaven face to the misted heaven.

"Ah would call whatever plan ye have a wild one. How can we get this coffin floatin' on th' deep? She's high an' she's

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ruined. Ah wouldn't give a chew of tobacco for her th' way she is."

Micky McMasters looked toward the jungle. He ran his eyes along the stream that welled about the palm-roots. This stream disappeared under dense foliage. It came from the interior.

There were marks upon the palm-trunks to show exactly what could be expected in the rainy season. Twisted branches, matted under-brush, uprooted trees of giant size indicated a flood at one time.

"We'll take th' *Carmen* out across th' sea!" he snapped. "Th' first thing to do is to make 'er water-tight."

"As a sieve!" suggested Mike Monkey.

Micky McMasters sprang from the planks. He clenched his right fist and thrust it under Mike's pointed jaw.

"You make me weary!" he rasped. "Get below an' write out a full report of th' condition of th' engines. Report what is missing. Suggest substitutes.

"Red an' I will take up our quarters in th' chart-room. You can bunk below."

"There's snakes and crabs an' lizards down below."

"Go join them! Give me that report by sundown."

Mike squinted toward the sky. He started to say something concerning the sun and changed his mind. The steely glitter in the little cockney's eyes was a baleful thing. He had seen Micky McMasters in action before. He glided aft, climbed over the wreckage about the funnel and went through the engine-room hatchway.

Sounds issued from above that indicated some degree of work. Red and the skipper started throwing overboard everything that could not be used. They worked two hours.

They found beneath the bridge litter a small store of captain's supplies. It was evident from their quality that the skipper had lived on the best in the land.

"Potted chicken," said Red Landyard. "And here's absinth. And here's a keg of pickles. Why did he keep them in his cabin?"

"You know the scum that works these ships, Red? Kanakas an' chinks an' Malays an' black boys. Like as not there was women aboard."

"They got away and left these things because they were in a hurry. They took all of the boats—includin' th' dinky. Th' davit-falls show everything was lowered."

MICKY McMASTERS received Mike Monkey's report and read it by aid of the light from a fire which the Yankee mate started on a flattened-out ventilator.

The engineer had worked hard. He summed up his own efforts with a verbal thrust.

"Gaskets leakin', sea-plate cracked, bilge-pumps without rods, high-pressure cylinder shorn of its asbestos jacket by some heathen, little oil, no tools to speak of except spanners an' hammers an' files which Ah found in th' shaft-alley where——"

"'Vast that!" said Micky McMasters. "Is this a complete report?"

"Ah left a few details out—which slipped me."

"How long will it take you to build the fires, chase steam through the pipes and turn the screw over? I suppose there is one. It must be under th' sand at th' stern.

"Th' rudder is all right. They even left th' tiller-cables."

"Ah need assistance."

Micky McMasters gazed longingly toward the dark jungle.

"I think there will be some forthcomin'," he said. "Th' same crew o' robbers who gutted this ship may come back. There's probably a village in th' interior. Some of th' black boys will work—when persuaded."

The little skipper closed his right fist suggestively.

"You see, Mike," he went on sweetly, "a white man is a king."

"Not without clothes of some kind!"

"We'll dress when it gets cooler," said Micky. "There's a bundle or two of slop-chest stuff aboard—dungaree clothes an' brogans. Do you think you can repair th' engines an' boilers in one month?"

"Ah can—with help on th' heavy parts. Th' condenser looks all right on th' outside. It's an old Hargar & Sinclair one."

"You can fill the boilers from the river."

"Boilers! There's only one, with twa doors. It's probably badly scaled on th' tube-sheet."

Micky McMasters smiled.

"So much th' better," he said, "if there's only one. That makes less work for you, Mike."

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"Work! Ah hae worked an' walked an' suffered all of a fortnight. Ah am going to rest a day or two."

"We'll all rest," concluded Micky McMasters, "when we get out to sea."

The little skipper's promise was long in fulfilment. The salvaging of the Peruvian tramp *Carmen* was the labor of months. Red Landyard and Mike Monkey were many times on the point of leaving the ship and seeking oblivion in the jungle.

Micky McMasters became half-crazed from heat and ambition. He dwelt on the glories of owning a ship. He pointed out the *Carmen's* use in a world that was sadly in need of bottoms.

"Traffic an' traffickings," he muttered during the evenings' rests. "Bales an' casks an' cargoes. Th' seven seas are open.

"Th' port officers won't know where we got the ship. We've tuk th' bridge an' deck-house off. We trimmed th' ventilators. Th' funnel is in a different place. 'Er masts are now palm-stems—with twisted vines for rigging.

"All we need is paint an' a union jack flyin' astern—then we'll go seek profits."

"We'll go into a jail!" was Mike Monkey's conviction. "Don't somebody at Caliente own this weepin' ruin? He still owns it. All we get is th' salvage—if we float her."

The little skipper's irritability passed with the coming of the heavy rains. He had a wife— "the missus" he called her—at Great Grimsby, England. He intended sailing the *Carmen* into the Humber some day and pointing proudly to his first ship.

Before this event could possibly take place it would be necessary to make port-repairs, paint the tramp and find a charter. The papers showing rating, ownership and custom duties paid were the least of his troubles. There were South American and Central American government officials who would swear to anything for gold.

He inspected the *Carmen* as the flood-water from the river started swinging her bow away from the jungle's fringe. The unknown tribe of natives that had gutted the tramp had not revisited the wreck. No sail or smoke, save once a tiny smudge far out, disturbed the peaceful setting.

Micky reached the stern where Mike Monkey sat in a boatswain's chair that was lashed to the repaired fife-rail. The engineer had mixed a thick paint out of turpentine, lamp-black and red lead. The result was a color never before seen on land or sea. It resembled a rusty purple.

"Ah have enough," called up Mike Monkey, "to paint th' deck fixtures an' twa or three names. Ah can blend some more if necessary. There's plenty of lamp-black an' turpentine."

"Wot shall Ah christen this weepin' ruin? Ah do not like th' name *Carmen.* It's too soft."

Micky McMasters gripped the fife-rail. He leaned far out. The turgid waters from the jungle river had risen to the lowermost load-line mark on the rudder.

"Name 'er *Birken'ead!*" he ordered. "Th' *Birken'ead* out of Melbourne. We'll pretend to hail from there. It's a bloomin' long ways hoff in case questions are asked."

The thrifty engineer made his paint go a long way. He mixed more after printing *Birkenhead* on the stern and bow. He daubed the funnel. He touched up a deck-house Micky McMasters had erected with the aid of Red Landyard abaft the fore-mast.

He ended his ornamental labors by scraping the engine's two cylinders, sand-papering the rusty spots and applying a thin coat of turpentine and lamp-black. He applied a finishing touch by neatly inscribing the low-pressure steam-chest:

Old Bill.

The job on the *Carmen's* engines from any view-point was a startling change from the condition in which he had first found them. The absence of a jacket on one cylinder, the stripped steam-pipes, the general removal of all things portable by the natives, had wrought a great difference. The Peruvian engineer who had abandoned the tramp would not have recognized his own stoke-hole or engine-room.

"Havin' done my duty," Mike Monkey told the little skipper, "Ah now am going ashore for a long sleep. Ah want no more o' ships for three days at least."

Micky McMasters pointed toward the swollen river which crept through the through like a yellow serpent.

"You stay aboard!" he snapped. "Th' rains 'ave started in th' mountains o' th' interior. Soon we'll be flooded out to sea.

"Th' wheelman or officer who steered th' *Carmen* to this place had that idea. 'E abandoned ship—and went ashore. Th' jungle never gives up its secrets."

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"Ah would like some sleep."

Micky McMaster eyed the engineer.

"Get below," he said sweetly. "Turn in for one watch. Then build your fires an' try your engines. We may 'ave to go out o' 'ere—without much notice. Those tropical rivers——"

Mike Monkey gulped his thoughts and took the captain's orders. He was awakened toward morning by a dizzy feeling.

The ship was free at the bow. Her stern held. The sand-bar beneath her keel was being eroded by the rushing waters from the river.

ALL that day the three castaways worked feverishly. The *Birkenhead* was held with her blunt stem to the current by an anchor which Red Landyard lowered to the mass of vegetation which gathered about the bow.

A dam formed across the two sand-spits. High tide was due at noon.

The sky grew black. Thunder rolled through the swaying stems of the palms. A half-hurricane, half-turn of the trade-wind, descended upon the coast.

The patched plates forward started to leak with the rising of the water. Mike Monkey tried steam on his bilge and fire pump. Its packing was made from oakum.

The pump struck, squeaked and stopped in the middle of a stroke. It suddenly jammed forward. It reversed its motion. It began clamping despite the bent rod which had been fashioned from a condenser-tube.

The Scotch-Irish engineer spent the busiest day of his life. He scattered good Wellington coal on the fire, leaped through the stoke-hole door, examined the engines and the stuffing-boxes in the shaft-alley, and repeated the operations. He sweated, naked and alone.

He heard finally the hoarse shout of the skipper informing him that the ship was being hurtled seaward. He turned the hand-wheel on the main steam-line.

The engines leaked in a number of places. They grunted and groaned. They started under the pressure of sixty pounds of live steam.

"Give 'er more!" shouted Micky McMasters. "Give 'er ——, Mike!"

Mike Monkey glared through the engine-room hatch. The little captain's face was covered with smiles. It was evident that the danger from the shore had passed.

The storm held steady for two days. The *Birkenhead*, so christened, behaved unkindly to the three men who had saved her from a sandy grave. She slowly filled forward. Her engines stopped once.

Micky McMasters, wise in the way of the sea, allowed her to ride with her starboard quarter to the waves and her helm hard up.

The main fire and bilge pump kept operating. Mike Monkey gradually built the steam in the single boiler. He worked like a demon in the darkness. Red Landyard came below, leaving the little skipper to hold the deck.

The *Birkenhead* survived the storm. She was pumped out and set on a course which Micky McMasters calculated would do them the most good.

He estimated the amount of coal in the bunkers. He recalled a port where there was little danger of being molested while certain repairs and changes were being made.

Terrazas, a semi-harbor with a row of low mud forts and houses, is not down on many maps. There was no chance at all that the freighter had ever put in there.

The government of the land was corrupt to the core. Micky McMasters feared it might be too corrupt.

It was necessary to change the *Birkenhead's* course after the coast was sighted. The little skipper had no sextant.

He took aboard a native who came out in a canoe. This native was familiar with Terrazas.

He was questioned by Micky McMasters and Red Landyard. He offered to sign as a coal-passer and assist Mike Monkey.

The engineer welcomed the assistant by pointing to "Old Bill," the low-pressure cylinder.

"Big idol," he said dryly. "Ye can worship it when there's no work to do—which won't be often."

The Yankee mate had saved the anchor. He allowed it to run out from the vertical windlass as Terrazas was reached.

The ship swung alongshore. Micky McMasters, shaved by aid of a sharpened and honed file, clothed in No. 2 duck cut from sail-cloth and wearing a grass-woven hat, took the native's canoe and visited—gammed he called it afterward—certain powers who sat at the West Coast port.

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He returned at midnight. The bargain he struck was a fair one. He went over the details of his arrangement by telling Red Landyard and the engineer.

"Blyme good luck! There's a 'undred tons more or less of bananas which the agent for the owner wants delivered in a southern port. I told 'im we were in ballast. He agrees to help fit us out, pay us ten dollars a tone for carrying the fruit and see that we get a cargo for San Francisco. He has a branch agency in Peru."

"How about papers?" asked Red Landyard.

"I told 'im we had jettisoned a cargo in a great storm. That we came from Melbourne originally. That we 'ad put in at Tahiti—or somethin' like that."

"Peru," said Mike Monkey, "is in th' direction of Caliente—where this ship belongs. Why not go th' other way, skipper?"

"We go where th' business is," declared the skipper. "We 'ave a chance to redeem ourselves an' make a fortune. Ocean rates are 'igh!"

"Ye recall this ship isn't ours, skipper?"

"But th' clearance papers an' th' master's an' mate's certificates an' Lloyd's ratin' an' our bill o' sale o' this ship?"

"—— them," said Micky. "We'll make our own papers."

THE banana agent at Terrazas, when not too drunk, aided Micky McMasters in getting the *Birkenhead* ready for a run down the coast. He sent out a few native beachmen, who were put to work by Red Landyard.

The Yankee mate went over the holds and deck-fittings with an eye out to changing every detail. He moved the windless three feet aft. He broke down the forecastle bulkhead and erected a number of bunks in a deck-house.

He took pains to turn planks and replace them in their former positions. This gave the deck an appearance of newness.

Mike Monkey painted the *Birkenhead* with a priming coat of battle-ship gray. He striped it along the water-line. He added a weird-looking Plimsoll mark the size of a target. He scrawled cabalistic figures everywhere.

Micky McMasters supervised the loading of the cargo of bananas and certain stores which the agent advanced. A union jack was manufactured out of calico.

A rusty compass and an old ivory-scale quadrant completed his instruments. The chronometer he set up in the deck-house was an American eight-day alarm-clock.

His last touch was convincing. He made out ship's papers on blank consular reports and impressive custom receipts. These were plastered with many seals.

The signatures at the bottom of each document were done in Red Landyard's and Mike Monkey's scrawling chirographies —which no one could decipher.

A bill of sale showing that the *Birkenhead* was owned solely by Micky McMasters of Melbourne and elsewhere was the pride of his collection. It had been printed by a Terrazas compositor who knew no English. Here and there a Spanish letter showed with the accent mark.

"'Aving taken care of every contingency," declared the little skipper, "we will proceed to Peru with all speed."

"That won't be much," said Mike Monkey. "Not enough to escape a gunboat."

Micky McMasters did not flare at his only engineer. He mildly pointed toward the engine-room companion, bright with new paint obtained from the banana agent.

"Kick over th' engines, Mike. You 'ave two assistants, now—native an' another native. Work them!"

Red Landyard with the aid of capstan bars and three deck-hands hoisted the *Birkenhead's* anchor to the davit-head, the steam-windlass with its leaking pipe-joints refusing to bulge any other way.

The ship bore to open sea. The union jack fluttered astern. Some but not all of the standing rigging was in place. The two palm-stem masts whipped as the *Birkenhead* rolled.

"She'll answer," said Micky McMasters to his mate. "She'll need a lot of work done in a British port. She lacks speed an' I suppose she's not th' pride of th' ocean; but, Red, she's all ours—from stem to stern, from keel to truck."

The big mate was silent. There was no use dampening the ardor of the cockney skipper. It was the first ship Micky McMasters had ever owned. His ambition in life was to establish a line of freighters.

The cargo of bananas although somewhat green when loaded was expected to ripen rapidly under the heat of the tropical sun. The position of the ship on the third

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day after leaving Terrazas was a few degrees below the equator.

"Directly opposite Caliente!" suggested Mike Monkey. "That's where she came from."

This reminder caused Red Landyard to port the helm fifteen degrees and make for deeper water where there was less chance of being sighted by a coaster.

The cockney skipper brooded over Mike's remark. He dropped below and had it out with the Scotch-Irish engineer.

"Hif I 'ear anythin' more of Caliente, where you say this freighter belongs, I'll break you at th' first regular port of call. Didn't they abandon th' *Carmen?* Isn't th' *Carmen* posted as missing?

"This is another ship—from keelson to maintop. She's th' *Birken'ead* out of Melbourne—Micky McMasters, skipper."

"Can a tiger change its stripes?"

"Yes—you miserable, squintin' scum!"

"Ye can't prove it b' me. Once th' *Carmen* always th' *Carmen.* I didn't sign on for piracy."

Micky McMasters searched in the gloom of the engine-room for a weapon. Mike Monkey glided through the stoke-hole door. His rasping voice was heard telling the native stokers that the skipper had gone daft. Then the stoke-hole door was closed.

THE skipper dropped the weapon he had found—a rusty hammer—and climbed to the deck. He rimmed the watery world with an anxious glance. He hurried forward where Red Landyard stood by the side of the exposed wheel.

"Do you expect anything?" he asked the Yankee mate anxiously.

"I do, skipper. We have no glass, but it seems as if a barometer would indicate a coming storm. I don't like the looks of the sky to win'ward."

"Gol bly' me, no! Hit's th' color of a hurricane."

The storm reached the *Birkenhead* at nightfall. Micky immediately ordered the engine-speed reduced to bare turning over and put the freighter before the wind. She lay with the gale on her quarter and the high seas coming from the same direction.

Morning broke. The hurricane had settled down to one of those tropical storms wherein nothing could be done but ride it out.

Mountainous seas curled toward the *Birkenhead.* She weathered them in a manner. Her deck listed to port. The remainder of the bunker coal shifted. The engines promised to tear loose from their holding-bolts.

Noon brought no change. Micky McMasters figured that they were within a hundred miles of a lee shore. This shore was most certain to be rock-bound.

The first graying of night revealed athwart the clouds a splinter of light and then the flare of a rocket. A distress signal had been sent up from a ship to windward. The signal was repeated.

Micky McMasters and his two companions, for Mike Monkey had climbed from the engine-room, seized stays and watched for some other sign of the ship. A seething cloud of spray whipped across the deck. The funnel of the *Birkenhead* threatened to go by the board. One palm-stem mast snapped close to deck.

"Gawd 'ave mercy!" exclaimed the cockney skipper suddenly. "See 'er? There to win'ward. There's a whackin' passenger-boat on 'er beams' end. She's covered black with people."

Red Landyard made out the derelict. It was a coasting-vessel, with high, varnished cabins and two funnels. The waves dashed over her submerged stern.

A third rocket burned through the night. The distressed ship had lost her boats and rafts. Black specks showed in the water to leeward.

"They're jumpin' off!" exclaimed Mike Monkey. "She's sinkin' with all hands."

To their everlasting credit the three seamen had one idea in common. They spoke their minds in three sentences.

"We've got to save them!" said the Yankee.

"They'll perish hif we don't," whispered Micky.

"Ye have scant time!" declared Mike Monkey.

The *Birkenhead's* wheel was spun. The engines were given all the steam. The propeller thrashed astern. The tramp freighter rounded, buried her blunt stem in green seas and started clamping toward the sinking ship.

Micky McMasters lashed himself on top of the deck-house. He issued orders through a battered trumpet. He worked the *Birkenhead* under the lee of the wreck.

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He held the position through the night.

No one ever knew how the thing was accomplished. Swimmers were dragged over the tramp's dipping rail. An improvised raft brought a score of Peruvian women and children.

A line was sent to the high bow of the passenger-boat. Down this line half-naked men slid to safety.

The captain of the *Guayaquil*, as the vessel proved to be, was the last to be rescued. He came slowly through a wreckage-strewn sea. He was helped aboard by Red Landyard.

"Any left?" asked the mate laconically.

"None, *señor*."

"How many were aboard your ship?"

"Three hundred and eighty, *señor*."

The mate knew that many of that number had perished. There were not more than two hundred survivors aboard the *Birkenhead*. Most of them were bruised and weak from exposure.

He raised his eyes. The *Guayaquil's* bow lifted. Her stern went down. A roar sounded. The ship sank.

Circling the spot, Micky McMasters guided the overladen *Birkenhead*. He took the chances few men would. He made sure that no living arm was raised in a desperate call.

Then he gave the order to put the tramp's helm down. He personally saw that Mike Monkey generated every pound of steam that the single double-door boiler was capable of giving to the laboring engines.

Women, young girls and crying children cluttered the alleyways and passages of the *Birkenhead*. Bleeding men lay in the forehold and gasped for air. The deck was crowded with a horde of survivors. Among these were men of position, and here and there a lady, by the texture of the clothes she had managed to save.

Driving toward the coast in a swelter of foam, the *Birkenhead* progressed. The wind milled. It changed to an offshore gale. The seas crossed. The poorly repaired and altogether overladen freighter made bad work of the going.

Mike Monkey labored with the bilge-pump. Hand-pumps were rigged in order to save the ship. Sea-water was dipped from the forehold and engine-room. It came in faster than it could be thrown overboard.

The cargo of bananas was jettisoned. The coal, which had been sufficient to reach the port of call in Peru, began to give out. Micky stubbornly drove into the wind. There was one harbor within two hundred miles—north and south. Some of the women and all of the children needed medical attention.

Mike Monkey came on deck, black with drippings from oil and bilge-water. He crept forward and squinted at the binnacle compass which had been obtained from the banana agent at Terrazas.

"Ye are headin' for Caliente," he said to the skipper.

"—— you, yes!" said Micky McMasters. "Hit's our only chance."

Leaking at every seam, staggering from the force of the waves, dripping rusty slime from her deck, and at the end of her coal, the *Birkenhead* surged between the headlands that marked the harbor of Caliente.

She went over the bar, rolled both rails under and floated to quiet waters. The hurricane whimpered overhead. It had been denied its almost certain prey.

Micky McMasters motioned for Red Landyard to drop the anchor. Mike Monkey crawled out of the engine-room companion. He did not need to shut off the steam. There was none.

The three seamen took charge of lowering the survivors of the *Guayaquil* to shore and hospital boats. Her captain was the last to leave the *Birkenhead*.

"Send out a lighter with coal," said Micky McMasters. "We've only th' 'and pumps workin'."

"*Si, señor!*" came to the little skipper.

Mike Monkey leaned against a shattered rail and said:

"Ah hope ye are satisfied that we done our duty. Ah hae no doubt it was for th' best that we came to Caliente."

Micky McMasters raised an unshaven face and studied the outlines of the range which towered over the harbor like teeth of a giant saw.

"Tomorrow," he declared, "we will 'ear from th' port officers. Until then we sleep an' let th' native crew pump ship."

IT WAS two days instead of one before things began to move in the sleepy port of Caliente. An overfat alcalde came out with his staff. An under-governor invited Micky ashore. A

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band started playing American and English airs on the Prado.

There arrived by way of a mahogany-trimmed and well-manned naphtha launch a little gray-haired man who was most concerned in everything pertaining to the *Birkenhead*, her history, tonnage and the prospects of a charter or sale.

Micky McMasters wore a worried look. He went ashore with the little man. They came out together. They visited the Prado. A week passed with endless questions and inspections.

Finally the cockney skipper confided the good news to his mates.

"Sold she his!" he declared. "I sold th' 'ooker to th' richest man in th' port. 'E owns all of th' coast shipping. 'E owned th' *Guayaquil*—what went down."

" 'E's payin' hus in British gold. We get th' money ashore. We can wait around.

"There's a steamer, the *Durango*, due in two days. She goes to th' States arfter puttin' in at a coffee-port or two. We'll take 'er."

Mike Monkey screwed his homely face in a question-mark.

"Wot? Did ye sell our ship in this weird port? Why, she came from here!"

"She came an' she stays!" snapped Micky. "D' you think anybody could recognize th' *Carmen*—with what we done to 'er—with all th' work we put hon 'er an' all th' paint you wasted?"

"How much did you get, Micky?" asked Red Landyard.

"Ten thousand dollars—American. Hit's all she's worth. Hit's all we'd o' been allowed for salvage—after long litigation."

"Who is the mon ye sold her to?" rasped Mike Monkey.

The little skipper drew out a thick sheaf of important-looking papers. He opened one. He glanced from the engineer to the erect figure of the Yankee mate.

" 'Is name is Don José Francisco. 'E's worth ten million p'un's—more or less."

Mike Monkey grasped a funnel-stay.

"Wot was th' name of th' owner of the *Carmen?*"

"Don José Francisco! I sold 'im 'is own ship. 'E didn't know hit. 'E never will know hit!"

Micky McMasters was wrong. It was aboard the first-class West Coast passenger boat *Durango*, one day out from Caliente, when he found out his mistake.

He stood between his two companions on the funnel-deck of the *Durango*. A purser touched a cap and handed him an envelope.

It was a short note pinned to a tinted check:

Señor:

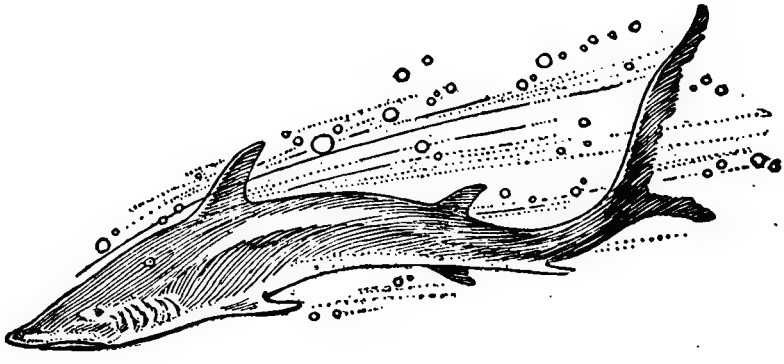
Will you present this slight token of appreciation to the brave and gallant gentlemen who aided you in bringing ashore the survivors of the *Guayaquil?* The other matter of the *Carmen*, sometimes called the *Birkenhead*, which I recognized from the beginning, was not worthy the true greatness that I have found in every man of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Obediently, yours, respected,

DON JOSÉ.

Micky McMasters flushed. He glanced at the check.

"Th' reward o' 'onor," he stammered to Mike Monkey and Red Landyard, "is more everywhere! Don José made it double th' price o' dis'onor. This check is—twenty thousand dollars—four thousand p'un's."



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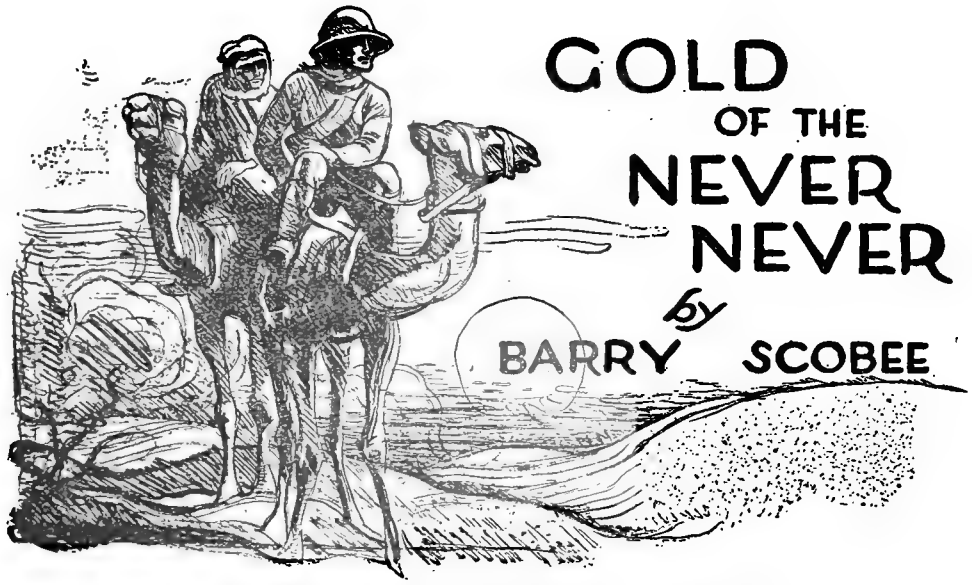

GOLD OF THE NEVER NEVER

by BARRY SCOBEE

Author of "The Rawhiders," "Road-Signs and a Nose-Ring," etc.

"THE thing that counts," asserted old Orson Pollock sternly, "is doing something."

"Tut-tut!" chided his nephew, who was the only man in the world nervy enough to be frivolous with the shipbuilder. "And a man's got to play a bit. All work and no play——"

"Great Stars and Stripes! When have you worked? You've done nothing since you left the university but pike around for gold in Alaska or Australia or Death Valley."

"—makes Johnny a money-grabber."

"Play! Play your head off, but after you've done a day's work."

"But, unc, you're inconsistent. Only yesterday you sat upon my poor squirming body, unc, because I like to play around at the restaurants where something besides electricity runs the piano. Didn't you advise dairy lu——"

Old Pollock threw up his hands in despair—and apparently got hold of an inspiration in the club's nice thick tobacco-smoke above his bald crown.

"Tell you what, boy," he said, "you're too good a lad to waste yourself. You go out and marry an intelligent and respectable stenographer who supports her parents and knows economy; then I'll bet a ship you quit your traipsing around and hunt a nice steady job."

"Nay-nay, uncle-o, I have me own plans fair thot, as Scotty would say."

"Seriously, Kenneth, why don't you tie on to some nice girl?"

"I'm going to. Sure I am. Some day I'll run across a pretty maid and I'll know that she's the Her of poetry and I'll go up to her and I'll say—

"'Miss, there's no use to struggle. Hie-est we at once to a a minis-teer——'"

"You make me sick. You never were serious in all your life."

Kenneth Pollock was fond of his uncle. There was a comradey feeling between them that kept the young man's impudence from being disrespect. So now when he saw that his uncle was deeply touched he patted the elder man's shoulder and became serious.

"Yes, I mean it, uncle-o. I'll get into business some of these days and you will be proud of me. And I am going to get married—find the girl just like that, and know she's the right one."

"May the fates speed the hour!"

MAYBE the fates did speed the hour biff-boom-bang just like that, for the little morning talk turned Ken Pollock serious, so that he felt his twenty-six years weighing upon him heavily; so heavily in fact that after he played an hour at golf and lunched with two frivolous and

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charming girls he donned corduroys, a jersey and a cap and set off from the saltiness of Seattle into the country for a few days' hike. The out-of-doors and not the city had the true appeal to him.

The very next morning, before the sun was high enough to wink over the apple-trees, Ken stepped to the side of the road to let a rumbling truck, approaching from behind, go by. When the vehicle was just abreast of him he saw the occupant, a girl with a knit cap saucily to one side.

"It's Her!" he said aloud; or at least moved his lips.

The girl tensed against clutch and brake and stopped the car with a jolt.

"What is it?" she asked.

"May I ride to the village with you?"

"Oh, is that it? I thought by your face that I had a flat."

She weighed him thoughtfully while he appraised her frank eyes.

"I suppose you can if you'll help me unload these apples at the station. Jump in."

"Wait!"

He blushed. He wanted to be very bold and make his boast good about the minister, for the fun of it, but her eyes were not thinking of love, so he compromised.

"Look at me. Are you married?"

She started, puzzled, frowned forbiddingly and smiled down at him with a little shake of the head as if he were very amusing.

"Then listen, please, before—I help unload the apples. I am not a tramp nor an escaped inmate of anything nor a man to bother women. I'm the nephew of Orson Pollock the ship-builder.

"I have said that some day I would see a girl and know her at first glance for the one I want to marry. See her and realize it by her—self."

He swallowed and hurried on.

"Pa—pardon me, but you're her. Don't answer now. Don't be angry. Wait till —you see how I can work at unloading apples."

He grinned in sudden confidence, such an appealing, urgent grin that she blushed and said:

"Hop in. I'll have to hurry."

Then she bent over the gear-shift to hide her confusion.

For a long time he sat beside her, eyes straight ahead, careful not to seem familiar. It must have been that she finally felt compassion for him or saw that he was quite harmless, for she spoke in a manner that invited conversation.

"I'm taking apples in for father. I am a country girl, Mister City Man."

"Proud of it?"

"Proud as a princess! Look at those apples. Best in the county."

"Best apples, best girl."

"You mustn't talk to me. I have to watch the road."

"NO, KENNETH," Sargie Kent repeated for the third time a week later.

"But it means everything to me—to you—to us; doesn't it?"

"I can't marry a man who claims the right to live in the world just because he has a rich uncle."

"But I shall get a job with him. He will give——"

"Give!"

She was scornful.

"Did you ever in all your life pay for the right to live?"

"What do you mean? Who does?"

"Most people do. They work and produce things that humanity needs or they make people happier by music or writing or they clerk or they— But you, you——"

"And you said you were a country girl!"

"But country girls nowadays have books, papers and opinions."

He did not answer. One foot patted uneasily the veranda step where they sat while his gaze went out over the misty Sound. But he was not seeing the mystery of faraway distances; he was trying to understand her point of view. Suddenly he gripped her shoulder.

"There is another man!" he exclaimed.

For one tense second she sat without moving, breathing; then:

"Yes," she said; "there is."

Then she dropped her eyes and turned her back squarely to him.

"Do—do you love him very much?"

"Yes."

"Why is he not here, Sargie?"

"He—he is—unfit."

"Where is he?"

"In his letters he says he is out at the edge of Never Never Land. His address is Kal-Logan in the Northern District of Australia. He says he is a missionary to the blackfellows, but——"

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"I understand; I see," he broke in to save her embarrassment, for from his experience among savages he visualized an unfit man among the blackfellows—dissipation, immorality, laziness, filth, worse.

"I wish he would come back," she said pensively.

Ken Pollock got to his feet slowly, and though it hurt he spoke as he felt he should.

"Sargie, I'll go out and send him back—or kill him."

She looked up at him quickly.

"You mustn't! You can't! That Never Never is a hard, hard land. You couldn't stand its awful——"

"No?" he half-sneered, his man's ability being assailed.

His hand went out and the fingers rested an instant lingeringly on her cheek. He stooped quickly and kissed her forehead. He might have said that to bring the other man back hurt inside more than anything he had ever set out to do, but he wasn't talkative on such subjects.

"I'll find him and get him back—or kill him," he repeated.

For a moment she regarded him as if she would somehow relent—he didn't know just how—then her face hardened the tiniest perceptable bit.

"I'll let you know," he said. "Good-by."

He walked away and never looked back to see how she might be taking his departure. He didn't want to see the hope in her countenance for the other man's return.

WHEN Australia happens to occur to the average American he thinks of the Sydney side. But there is a Perth side also, and it was at Perth that Ken Pollock in time landed. He flitted from the city with scarcely a hello to acquaintances—he had been in this country before—and sweltered on a dusty night journey in the crowded train to the old and petered-out gold-town of Kalgoorlie, which hunches its back to the blowing sands at the edge of the sunburned dry lands. Once it was a glittering, rampant Cripple Creek or Silver City, but now it was a place where the old-timers were glad of a chance at a job in the open.

The first person Ken saw that he knew when he dropped from the train he hailed with an urgent gladness.

"Hi, Amah, you driver of camels, do you want a job?"

Amah ran up, stopped, grinned and bowed, then stepped closer, so that Pollock whiffed his garlicky breath.

"The jingle of gold is a magical sound," he suggested.

"How many camels have you now?"

"Three are left, by the grace of God."

"Good. I want to find a man named——"

For the thousandth time he regretted he had forgotten to ask the Unfit Man's name, but "the missionary at Kal-Logan" would be sufficient chart, he thought.

"Do you know where Kal-Logan is, out in the Never Never?"

"It can be found. Ah—I remember! Old forgotten diggings. Ah, meester, it is a journey there to break the heart."

"You will be well paid," Ken twinkled, "so you needn't bother to make a tale of horror."

"Eet is—what say you—a gamble with death and the devil take the thirsty."

Ken shook a handful of golden coins. Amah's eyes glittered and his nut-brown bearded face said, "Yes," without a muscle twitching.

"Get your camels ready," Ken directed, pouring the wealth into Amah's dirty, eager claws. "Get supplies for the trip—you'll know how many. Get two black trackers. I've got to go to the bank—" this was for the Afghan's special benefit— "and I wish to make some inquiries."

At the end of the incredibly short space of two hours they were ready at the camel-driver's paddock. As Ken approached, one of the camels knelt groaningly at command for him to mount. Amah seized his arm gently.

"The word of a friend, *sahib*. I repeat—a gamble with death out there. Unless the most gracious God is kind——"

"Can that, Amah, if you understand me, I am doing this for——"

He caught himself. He had started to say, "For a woman," but that was nobody's business but his and assuredly not to be spoken of to a camel-driver.

"Is everything ready?"

He ran over the packs with a practised eye, making certain of water-bags especially.

"Nothing is amiss," Amah asserted grievedly. "I am the best camel man who ever left Calcutta. But the trackers, *sahib*—" he nodded his head to where the

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blackfellows stood—"I do not vouch with my honest word for those scoundrels."

Ken sized them up. They did look untrustworthy, but very likely no more so than any others.

"They and the husky dogs of the Klondike can never be trusted in a pinch; can they, Amah? But we'll risk them.

"And watch them lest they pull the stoppers from our water-bags some moonless night afar out on the sands. That is one of the gambles, eh?"

Straight northeast they drove toward the Never Never, which is one of the few mystery lands remaining in the world. With Kalgoorlie still at their tail they went into the dry lands where there was nothing but scrub-bush and whirlwinds—the willie-willies—to break the monotony of hard, brown and stony ground.

In the afternoon they were skirting the salt lakes which, should the camels break through the yellowish-white crust, would submerge them in bottomless quick-filth and poisonous gases. And Pollock's brain began to burn with the question of the Unfit Man.

"Of all the ships that were ever invented!" growled Ken when the beasts halted their loose swaying at evening of the second day. "My muscles are tied in a knot and my joints are full of this eternal sand."

The Afghan grinned superciliously.

"I'll make you grin from the other side of your mouth before we get there!" Ken exploded in weary, waspish wrath. "I—What under the sun is that?"

He was staring, alarmed, into the west.

Amah shaded his eyes.

"Blackfellows," he said succinctly. "Watch the water-bags lest they be spilling our water and leaving us at thirst."

"Hurry supper, then, camel-driver I don't like the looks of that gang."

By the time the fire of pencil-sized twigs was ablaze and the billy-can for tea was on the natives arrived—a troop of black women, wanderers, without men, which made them all the more revolting. They squatted about, jabbering, waiting a chance to filch food.

Ken was too tired to be interested. He sat down and lighted his pipe, while his own black boys hustled more wood and Amah kept busy with the supper.

Presently a black woman, young and smooth of limb, yet naked and her body as black as a white body could be were it rubbed with tar, squatted by him and began, of all things, to strum upon a kind of banjo, and to sing, of all things, Auld Lang Syne in English.

"Great Scot, Amah, what is this?" Ken demanded in amazement.

Amah laughed.

"She has been a servant in Sydney or Melbourne, master, and has—what you say?—reverted. There be many of her kind in the bush."

A vision of a white-skinned girl in a pert knitted cap came to him. The black woman thrummed and sang and grinned a silly, red-mouthed grin and tried to lord it over the white man in vulgar sport. His great weariness betrayed him again.

"Blast 'em!" he shouted and seized a whip, which he began to flourish and crack among the troop. "They've got to get out. I won't have 'em about."

As worn out as he was he refused to sleep that night, for the water-bags must be watched against the treachery of the blacks, and the trackers could not be trusted for loyalty nor Amah for staying awake.

The following day was one of torture, sitting his humped beast in the white-hot sun, prodding for speed. A phrase got to running through his mind rhythmically with the swaying:

"Will I kill him or take him back? Will I kill him or take him back?"

At evening Ken heard Amah condoling with the camels about the terrific speed of the journey.

"Don't like it, eh?" Pollock snarled.

"My poor beloveds will perish with the swiftness," wailed Amah. "See you not their weariness, master?"

"I'm weary too."

The driver was pleased to accept this sharp retort as a relenting of appetite for the journey, and with the January heat over the sand more like the top of a stove than he had ever seen it he was quite willing to turn back.

"The trail travels in two directions, master," he hinted.

"Eh?"

"To Kilgoorlie and to—the Unknown."

For a space of time in which Ken gazed backward and thought, "I could cook up a story for her," he was tempted.

"No," he said slowly, and unconsciously

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aloud. "I travel for an American's reason —for a woman—or to kill—I don't know which."

The Afghan cocked a puzzled ear.

"You speak a riddle, master."

"The whole affair is a riddle—but we'll solve it if we kill all the camels and have to walk. Be at the supper, Amah!"

To himself he said that this was the first unselfish thing he had ever done, the first useful thing, and he'd be everlastingly confounded—not the exact words—if he didn't carry it out. Thereafter he ceased his complaints and tried to be more cheerful —as if Sargie Kent were along, which indeed she was in spirit.

The eighth night of their journey over this sea of sand and rocks toward the drier horrors of the middle Never Never found them camping by a swamp, dry and salt on the surface, with a few trees rearing their stunted bushiness along the shore. Settled to supper, they beheld coming among the trees another troop of blacks, men as well as *lubras* this time.

The party, twenty or so, squatted around them, unafraid as some bush people were. They also indulged their evening meal—bugs and beetles from their rags of breechclothes, with here and there a daintier morsel in the form of a snake. Ken was at the point of driving the disgusting savages away when it occured to him that they might know something of the Unfit Man.

"Ask these heathen," he directed Amah, who spoke many dialects, "if they know of Kal-Logan and the white man who teaches there."

After much explanation from the versatile Amah the blackfellows brightened and shouted out as once voice a word which Ken did not grasp.

"They speak—ah—a name," the driver puzzled apologetically, "ah—renegade—no——"

"Outlaw?"

"No—some word—a merrymaker, a wild——"

"Roisterer?"

"You see my inside! You read my soul! That is it—Mad Roisterer!"

"As bad as I anticipated," Ken thought for he fully understood the significance of such a name when used in the christening of white men by savages.

"I will be the watch-dog tonight," the camel-driver volunteered after they had eaten. "These cunning vipers have keen eyes for the water-bags."

"I'll watch," Ken retorted. "Your eyes are weighted with lead."

AND watch he did, that there might be no chance at all for the savages to be treacherous. Throughout the night he sentry-paced back and forth, speculating upon the Unfit Man, trying to visualize Sargie Kent's expression when the Unfit Man should be returned or he himself should report to her that the Unfit Man was—dead.

But he did not consider one thing, because he was not aware of it, and that was the change taking place in him because he dared to face death in this savage and empty land for an unselfish purpose. The soul of him was becoming fine-tempered steel without his knowing it.

With the first streak of dawn in the east he roused Amah with a rough foot to prepare breakfast and watch the savages. He dropped to his blankets at once and was as inert as a log in an instant.

When he awoke to the tugging of Amah's excited hands at his shoulders he found the sun edging over the horizon and an agony of fear crimping the nut-brown face of the camel-driver.

"The water!" Amah screamed, his black eyes wild with fear. "The bags are empty."

Ken sprang up. Far off down the edge of the dry swamp he saw, or thought he saw, a flitting troop of blackfellows. Their hired trackers were gone.

A glance showed that the mischief was done. The water-bags lay empty in their own moist patches like a murdered man in his blood. A pint or so of tea in the billy-can on the supper-ashes was all that remained for them.

"They overpowered me," the Afghan asserted boldly. "They held my arms while they twisted the stoppers out with their teeth. They gagged——"

"You lie! You slept!"

"No-no-no! By the memory of my ancestors," whimpered the scoundrel under the lash of the white man's wrath. "They seized——"

"Shut up!"

Ken whipped out his good American automatic pistol.

"You make one break you show one

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sign of treachery, and you get this; savvy? We're going to Kal-Logan."

The Afghan, trembling, whimpering, set about preparing breakfast. When they had eaten Ken put the pint of tea into a bottle.

"I will relieve the master of the burden," Amah said, reaching for the bottle.

Their situation was as tense with danger as it could be. Ken's nerves were strung so tightly that they were at the breaking-point; he had either to curse and fight and all but murder, or laugh. The man's impudence and cunning was the last straw, so he laughed.

"Nay, nay, my shrewd-eyed camel-driver; not with Sir Death sitting on our shoulders like an organ-grinder's monkey. You will have your own burden prodding the beasts to the next hotel."

By midforenoon Amah was casting back longing glances and Ken's tissues were crying for moisture, but not one drop did they touch until the shadows of the camels lay straight down under their hairy bodies—noon, the sun so hot that it almost set the oil of Ken's hair a-sizzling when he took off his wide-brimmed hat for a second. Then they drank one swallow each, ate a can of moist meat, and drove on again.

"What is that?" Ken asked thickly in the middle of the afternoon, pointing to a line of low, rocky hills that lay like a gigantic caterpiller on the breast of the desert.

"A chance for water," Amah answered, and tugged his camel around to a quarter-angle and headed straight for the broken country.

They dismounted among the boulders and began to search the *gnamma*-holes, to scrape in the soaks on the south and perpetually shaded sides of the rocks, and to peer into the hidden basins of the crevices, but only dust awarded them.

Amah's tongue was swollen almost as badly as Ken's. He vowed that it was his last journey and bemoaned, not his death, but parting with his valuable camels.

"Hold out," Ken entreated. "We shall reach Kal-Logan by morning."

At dusk they rested an hour and drank three swallows of the tea. Not two swallows apiece were left. Then Ken drove Amah, who in turn drove the protesting beasts, and they lumbered onward through a rocky coulée.

At midnight they dismounted to rest and drank the remainder of the tea. To Amah's credit be it said that he tried to decline his share but gave in before Ken's sternness. Scarcely had he wet his throat when a look of horror passed over his face.

"What is it, Amah?"

"We—we have missed our way," the Afghan choked out. "This coulée—I know it—leads northwest and the rightness of our journey lies to the northeast."

"A half-night's travel lost," Pollock groaned.

"I—I went astray at the rocks."

"We will turn back. Mount! Don't delay us, you low-caste!"

They turned back over the route, finally cutting across for the eastward coulée. Under the moon, made hazy and fiery and dim by the impalpable yellow dust that rose from the drear plain with the heat-waves of the daytime, or the willie-willies, they pushed on, the camels spreading out with plaintive or angry grunts into their great distance-devouring stride.

Like flitting ghosts they went, and Ken marveled that the moon, winking at them, satirically, was the same gentle moon as that which was then perhaps westering in the sky over the roads and orchard and home of Sargie Kent.

Ken's thoughts fell again into a singsong that interpreted the only feeling which now survived in his mind or heart—

"Keep on, keep on, keep on."

Toward morning the camels turned stubborn and the contagion attacked Amah, who refused to go farther without rest. So they let the beasts stand without unloading while they themselves fell upon the ground in sleep. Some time afterward, Ken thought not long, he sat up suddenly from his dumb slumber, wide awake.

"The fool I am!" he cried out.

Amah sat up sharply.

"What, master?"

"We have drink, Amah. The juice of the can of peaches I have hidden in my pack that the youngest camel carries. I—" he said this in a stupid sort of amazement—"I remembered it in my sound sleep."

They hurried to where the youngest camel had stopped—and the camel was gone. Some whiff of moisture or patch of grass was the seducer perhaps; but gone. They slept till day, ate a little moist meat,

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which only made their bodies thirst the more, and set out once again.

When the sun was high, time no longer being of consequence, Ken, ashen-gray and dizzy, realized that his camel had halted, and he saw Amah digging at the roots of a scrub-bush with a knife. He got down and looked on, his lips too dry and thick for him to speak.

"For drink, American," the driver mumbled.

They cut the slender roots into short lengths, and when a hint of moisture gathered on the ends they moistened their lips and tongues. But the process was too slow and tantalizing to Ken, who drove the Afghan back to the camels.

As the journey went on, the animals groaning and insubordinate, Ken realized that the end was near. He got his note-book and pencil as he swayed along and started to write a brief last message, but the lead slid from the wood that was shrunken by the heat.

He was scorching under the great torrid ball of fire that was the sun. Dust gritted between his teeth and his throat crinkled and burned with dryness. He realized that in one of his dizzy attacks his consciousness would go, so he tied himself to the pack with dangling straps, with a hope that the camels might take him to some settlement. His last thoughts were characteristic of the new man within him.

"She'll never know—but I have—been useful—anyhow——"

THE next idea that penetrated his consciousness was that he seemed to be drowning in a surf that was beating over his mouth. He sat up abruptly and took a wet cloth from his lips.

"Morning," a cheery voice said. "You've slept over fourteen hours. Good thing you tied yourself to the pack."

Ken swayed dizzily and tried to collect his wits. He presently saw that he was on his blankets spread upon the dirt floor of a thatched shack, and realized that a big, blue-eyed white man stood above him grinning commiseratingly.

"Are you the missionary?" Ken asked dazedly.

"The missionary?" came the astonished counter-query.

"The—Roisterer."

"Oh, yes, I am he. Rotten name for these natives to give a man, isn't it? But they don't mean half they say."

Ken regarded him, saw his litheness, his generous frame, his friendly manner, and estimated that they were much alike in size and structure.

"You don't seem unfit," he remarked, a bit stupid yet.

"Unfit?"

"Do you know Sargie Kent?"

"Yes," the man answered, and sat down on a box, waitful, curious.

"I am going to be quite frank with you before we go farther. Sargie Kent told me that you were—unfit when she confessed that she loved you and I asked why you were not there. So I came out here to send you back to her—or kill you."

An indescribable expression played over the man's countenance, indescribable because it seemed to be made up of so many emotions.

"You— Who are you?" he demanded.

"Kenneth Pollock is my name."

"Oh, of Seattle—— And you've come out here to—send me back—reform me—or kill me because Sargie Kent thought me unfit but loves me. Do I get your idea?"

"You get me straight."

"You love her, then?"

Ken was on the point of telling the Roisterer to go to the devil, but thought better of it and answered simply—

"Yes."

"Great Wanderer of Australia! You make this trip over the desert, go thirsty and weary and half-kill yourself to send me back. Without hope of reward too—without a chance— Say, Kenneth Pollock, I want to shake your hand."

"I don't believe that is necessary," Ken answered coldly. "What is this missionary work of yours?"

"All right; to get down to brass tacks. I'm teaching these *boogers* to work."

He took a tin can from a shelf and dumped the contents on a sheet of wrapping-paper, grinning mischievously.

"Nuggets; dust. I pay 'em with liquor."

"Liquor?"

"Of my own making—molasses and flour and so on."

"You give these poor devils that stuff?"

"It's none of your blooming business, Pollock, if I do."

"And I suppose you drink it too."

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The man flushed.

"That's my affair also."

"What is your name?" Ken asked.

The Roisterer shot a malicious glance at his guest.

"Sargie calls me Billy, but the chums out here call me Bill."

"Bill it is then until we can go into this matter. I'm—I'm much obliged for your attention—er—watering me and getting me to bed."

"Don't mention that, stranger," Bill said with a return to his boyish good-nature. "Let's eat."

IN THE evening several black fellows brought in scarcely perceptible amounts of dust and a nugget or two. In payment they received small quantities of the black, viscid liquor.

"It's a wonder to me," Ken remarked, rousing from his day's sleep, "that you don't have a rush on here."

"Oh, there isn't enough dust and nuggets to pay wages."

Bill poured himself a cup of the liquor.

"Like a shot?" he asked.

"No. So that's what you are doing, eh? Killing yourself with that. It must be what Miss Kent meant."

"It isn't though. She doesn't know it. When she called me unfit she meant—well, she could call you unfit for the same reason."

"We'll not discuss that, but when I get my muscles limbered up I am going to put a stop to your boozing. I'm going to clean you up."

IN THEIR intercourse through the next few days they tried to be casual, discussing subjects as remote from themselves as possible, but all the while they studied each other secretly. Bill drank his nasty black liquor regularly, even going out of his way, it appeared, to tantalize Ken into trying to interfere.

In this he succeeded on the fourth evening. He poured a cup of the stuff and proposed Ken's good health.

"Drop that cup!" Pollock ordered in exasperation.

"You mean if I don't you will—er—What will you do?"

For answer Ken knocked it from his hand. Bill was not sober. He stood a moment while anger flamed within him, then lunged at Ken, who slapped him and sent him staggering. Bill turned savagely to the attack.

"Meddle, will you?" he grated.

Ken slapped time after time, not punishing physically so much as mentally. It was a strange fight, there in the dusk with no one to see but Amah, whose face was as unexpressive of emotion as a board.

"Will you stop your boozing?" Ken demanded.

"No, you fool!"

Ken struck out hard and straight, and Bill went down into the dust. He twisted a minute, then sat up and grinned.

"Some punch! You're the best man at this meeting of the club," he admitted.

He got to his feet and became as stern as his opponent.

"Boy, you've inspired me. I'm going to get myself up physically to return this, slap for slap and blow for blow. You've got the thrashing of your life coming, bo, you sure have."

BILLY did not drink the next day, nor the next, nor in the days that followed. Instead he worked hard in the gravel-pits and gradually he gave less and less liquor to the natives. Sometimes Ken surprized him in a twinkling, quizzical regard of—he decided finally that it was himself, Ken Pollock, who was the object of the regard.

Kenneth sent Amah back with instructions for some white-man camel-driver to bring out a big quantity of supplies. Then he found a pan and for the pure excitement of the thing panned for the meager points of gold in the long abandoned diggings along with Billy.

Their relations became amicable. At night they would lie on their blankets spread on the ground and exchange yarns of their goings and comings over the earth.

"There's lots of gold out here in the Never Never," Billy said one night.

"Yeh!" scoffed Ken.

"A man's got to recognize it, though. I'm beginning to."

There was a hint of diffidence in his tone.

"What do you mean, Bill?"

"Nothing. Why do you suppose Sargie Kent called me unfit and turned you down?"

"That's hardly a topic for discussion."

"But it is. She despises a loafer and squanderer of time. I've been a shiftless mortal for years—she's disgusted. That's

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what she meant by unfit. What's the difference between you and me?"

"I don't drink rotten liquor."

"I don't either any more. So what's the difference except that you've got money? I mean as man to man."

Ken pondered a space.

"There's none, I guess," he admitted. "So we are both loafers—unfit."

Billy had a remarkable ability in bringing his talks to little climaxes, in leaving a pertinent thought for Ken to mull over and getting away. He got away now, and they were not together again until they were preparing to turn in.

Billy stripped to the waist in the flickering candle-light and made an obvious attempt to show off the outstanding, smooth-working muscles of his shoulders and chest.

"I'm getting ready to return that thrashing," he grinned.

Ken didn't answer.

"Then I am going back to Seattle," Billy continued.

Ken turned his face to the darkness so that Billy could not see the wave of pain that passed over it.

"That's what I came out to get you to do, Bill—and believe me, old top, that's what you are going to do."

"You're a good sport."

Ken crawled silently under his blanket.

TWO weeks went by, with Ken growing more thoughtful and trying to be more good-natured so that Billy would not see his hurt and try to back out from his return home. To their surprize Amah, in place of the expected white driver, came in with supplies. He said he wanted to prove to himself that he could make the trip. The white man said "pride in his job," but Ken knew the Afghan wanted to make good in the eyes of his employer.

That night Billy found Ken in the shack. The Roisterer was again stripped to the waist and it was evident that he was in the best of condition.

"I'm ready to give you that thrashing back, Pollock," he said.

"I'm ready," Ken declared. "Then tomorrow you can go out with Amah."

"But I've decided not to give you any thrashing."

"Why? I'm going to make you go back."

"I'll tell you why, then. I am going back without making. That licking you gave me was the best medicine I ever had—that and looking at you, you shiftless, wealthy hobo! I don't mean any offense. But I would look at you, and you were as a mirror in which I saw myself; and I didn't like the view, Pollock. I'm going back; yes."

"Keep straight, Billy, until you—get to her; then you can't help keeping straight."

"Oh, I'll keep straight, all right. I feel like a new man. Never felt better in my life. Why, I feel like—like gold. Mind's clearer, too, and I've worked out a scheme for back in Seattle. Want to hear it, old top?"

Ken was staring at the candle and forgot to answer.

"Want to hear about my plan, old-timer?"

"Oh—go ahead."

"That licking taught me—er—my acquiring fine physical condition taught me the value of health. I'm going back to Seattle and start a training-camp for broken-down men somewhere out in the country.

"That's worth while, Ken. That will be actually saving lives and helping one's fellow man.

"And I want you to join me in the project. I'll not expect you to put in a cent more than I do. What say?"

"Nope. I'll stick out here."

"And be unfit?"

"No, I'll try not to be unfit; but I'm not going back to Seattle."

"All right-o. But I think Sar—Miss Kent will be put out about it."

"Nope, Billy. She'll have you."

"Listen, Ken. I think she had your good in mind when she egged you on to coming out here. She wanted you to do something unselfish and worth while. You have, Ken. I can see she's made a changed man out of you. I've studied you. I wanted to make certain."

"She has. Tell her so."

"But I want you to go back and tell her yourself."

"No!"

"All right, old top. I am about ready to go back. I'll be cabling her from Perth. I just wanted to make sure about you. Suit yourself.

"But I just want to add this—" and he spoke very slowly—"if you — don't go back—my sister Sargie—is going to be disappointed. I know her!"

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THE TRANSFERENCE OF THE SPIRIT-SOULS

T. S. MILLER

FOR three days the village had been busy making coffins. Tiny coffins they were—a foot or so long and about six inches wide. The Africans toiled at the work with that intense absorption which marks the Niger negro. Then they set to work making little images of clay and some carved out of mangrove wood. These images were then painted red with camwood dye. By that I knew that, in some mysterious way, the whole business pertained to ju-ju, for red is the color of blood, and blood is the life—the spirit. And if I had had any doubts they would have been settled by the important manner of the village wizard. He was the high-muck-a-muck—archbishop, pope, high priest and then some.

There came a very black night—the kind of night when spirits are abroad. About midnight a strange procession formed. Led by the wizard, festooned in chalk—the sacred chalk that is always in evidence in ju-ju ceremonies—twenty or more men each took a coffin, on the lid of which was tied a figure, and to funeral tomtomming and chanted lamentations marched somberly to the burial-ground of the outcasts. This comprised a couple of acres in a clearing in the jungle, where were buried those who had died violent deaths, suicides, victims of witchcraft, twin children and those whose deaths had seemed mysterious and unnatural and were therefore ju-ju; for anything unnatural is, in the simplicity of the West African, occult—ju-ju, that is to say.

Arrived at the burial-ground, the coffins were set down. The bearers squatted on their haunches around the wizard, who with deep gravity proceed by incantations and mysterious doings to conjure the spirits from the graves of the outcasts into the little images.

The onlooking white man did not laugh. To be quite frank, he was awed. This was a solemn business—a very important business. To the blacks it was as sacred as high mass. "Tomfoolery," you say, but you would not have said it had you seen the wizard's intense preoccupation, or had you heard his long invocations, the wail of the men, the funeral throb of the drums, and all around, the Stygian jungle, the black pall of suspended clouds, the penetrating, awful silence into which the drumming and wailing died away smothered; and the black silhouettes of the mourners, distorted into inhuman shapes by the dancing light of smoky grass torches.

It was a sacred business, this job of reclaiming the spirit-souls of the poor outcasts. The mourners were relatives of the deceased, and any one who failed to conjure to the spirit of his relative from his dishonored grave was stigmatized for life; nay more, he was liable to be haunted and pestered by the spirit. So they groaned in their souls and chanted and wailed and pleaded with Orumbi, the Great Spirit.

At last the wizard was satisfied that he had had the spirit-souls of the outcasts reembodied in the images. No doubt a great part of his satisfaction lay in the mashed yams and plantains and the eggs and chickens which the relatives of the outcasts paid him for his necromancy. He gave the sign and the mourners rose. Each took up his coffin with the image on the lid and marched back to the village, and through it to the proper burial-ground, where graves were dug and coffins and images buried. Then all returned to the village for a week's feasting and rejoicing.

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ANOTHER ACE FOR ANANIAS

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Playing Safe in Piperock," "Assisting Ananias," etc.

"IT'S an art, like playing a jew's-harp, turning a jack in a seven-up game or changing a Bar D brand to a Triangle P," explains "Chuck" Warner. "You and George Washington runs a dead heat, 'Telescope.' It's natural that he beats you out, 'cause in his time the world was very young and the sheriffs were few and far between.

"You don't need go kiootin' around about your honesty. You've got to be good, 'cause you ain't got the ability to lie. *Sabe?* Honest to gosh, tall-feller, you'll never have nothing in this vale of tears.

"You ain't got no imagination like me and Henry and 'Muley.' We can hang the Injun sign on you any old time, 'cause you trusts humanity."

"I've got a conscience," states Telescope, looking up from a three-months-old magazine. "I can sleep nights. *Sabe?* Even at that I have lied—some."

"Sure—and got caught at it," grins Chuck. "Your mouth gets so dry you can't spit."

"Honesty is the best policy," argues Telescope.

"Uh-huh—sure," snorts Chuck. "Teacher used to keep me in after school and make me write it a hundred times. She looks good in print, but as a working policy she don't assay a trace. Man has got to lie.

"Why, Telescope, a feller even lies with his face when he plays poker. You look like three aces when you've got a bob-tail, and then you expresses a bob-tail when you've got three aces. Sure it's a art."

"I hate a liar," declares Telescope. "Hate 'em like ——!"

"All right, cowboy," grins Chuck; "go to it. Pick yourself a high hill and just set there and hate mostly everybody what amounts to anything or has amounted to anything since the Old Testament was revised by the stone-cutters.

"Everybody is entitled to their own ideas, but don't chide us because we appreciate our art to the extent that we inaugurates an emblem of superiority. She ain't gaudy but she's neat and expressive."

Chuck holds up a little bronze figure which a storekeeper in Paradise gets with a supply of cigaret tobacco, and lets the sun glisten on its horns.

"I swear," says Chuck solemn-like, "to defend thee with my honor."

Telescope snorts and goes on reading. Such is art appreciated. I don't chide Telescope Tolliver, 'cause I think it's all right to have one honest man among us. I don't figure none on winning that emblem, 'cause I don't think there's a man living who can beat Chuck at the prevaricating pastime, but as old "Hip Shot" used to say—

"Knowledge is a powerful good thing, but there never was a man wise enough to

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know which way a dill pickle is going to squirt."

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h-h!" wailed Telescope. "Oh-h-h-h-h-h, ——!"

Then he sets down on the sidewalk so hard that his bronc pulled back and broke a perfectly good head-stall. Telescope sets there paying no attention to anything while me and Chuck herds that fool bronc into a corner.

Muley leans against a porch post and wastes several cigaret-papers trying to roll one one-handed while we ties up that bronc, and then we all sets down with the suffering Telescope.

"Taking the exclamation into due consideration and observing the extreme pallor of the patient, I'd say he's been affected by mail," observes Chuck.

Telescope licks his lips and takes a deep breath.

"Somebody died?" asks Muley, fussing with a cigaret-paper. "Dang it all, I wish I knowed how to roll 'em one-handed. 'Pears that she's a cowboy accomplishment, but I can't do it."

"You ain't no cowboy," says I. "You're too young, Muley. Remember you've only been punching cows for twelve years. Forty years from now you'll be able to keep your rope from tangling, and if your thumbs don't wear out you'll be able to roll a cigaret—two-handed."

"Where does it hurt yuh, Telescope?" asks Chuck. "Tell yo' li'l buddie."

"Gas on his stummick," declares Muley, opening a fresh package. "Turn him across your lap and pat him over the kidneys. Don't jiggle him on your lap, 'cause that causes colic."

"Better take him over to Doc Milliken, I reckon," grins Chuck. "He acts like a calf what had absorbed too much green clover. He's got awful pains, Muley.

"Look at that face, wouldja? Nobody ever gets a expression like that unless they're one whoop from a graveyard."

"A-h-h-h-h-h——!" groans Telescope.

"It talks!" whoops Chuck. "By grab, I know just how Edison felt when he cut loose his first phonygraft record. Speak again, Horatio."

"Sing for us," pleads Chuck. "You're be-yu-tiful when you sing, Clementine."

Telescope jams that letter down in his chaps pocket and walks across the street to a saloon.

"Something has went crosswise with our first tenor," says Muley. "Did any of you see that envelope?"

"I think it was from Kentucky," says I.

"Ah!" grunts Chuck. "That clears up the mystery. Somebody has died and left him a million. He hates money."

"Just like I do my two legs," says Muley. "Betcha four bits he's over there buying a drink for himself. Henry, did you notice what town in Kentucky it was from?"

"I said I thought it was from Kentucky."

"Oh—you thought so, eh? You didn't see the letter?"

"Do you know if he got a letter, Muley?"

"Chuck," says Muley, "some day I'm going to kill Henry Peck."

"That's a good thought," admits Chuck. "You do think of the cutest things to do, Muley. Call me in time to hear his last words, will yuh?"

TELESCOPE TOLLIVER says that he's from Kentucky. According to our code of honor a feller has a right to any birthplace he wants, as long as it don't conflict with anybody else's.

Chuck Warner never remembers where he was born the last time. If anybody says, "I was born in California," Chuck wiggles his ears and says, "So was I."

Maine, Michigan or Mexico is all the same to Chuck. Telescope brags that his relations are all rich—so does Chuck. Telescope claims that he's coming into a fortune some day; Chuck claims he went through one.

Me and Muley sets on Chuck's wish-bone one day to try and make him admit that he lied about going through that fortune, but he wouldn't admit that he lied. Swore he went through the Bunker Hill and Sullivan mine, and if that wasn't a fortune—what was it?

Chuck is an undersized puncher with a Roman-nosed face and such perfect control of his ear-muscles that we all believe in the transmigration of souls—of jassacks.

Muley Bowles is f-a-t. He's about three ax-handles across, writes poetry, tries to sing and cusses in a high-pitched voice.

I'm a twig on the Peck tree. My folks handed me Henry Clay along with a good set of brains, and I eventually growed up to be one of the best cow-hands on earth.

The four of us work for "Jay Bird" Whittaker, who owns the Cross J. He'd

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likely object to my statement regarding "work," but you can't expect too much from four talented hired hands. He can cuss for five minutes and never say the same thing twice and hates women almost as bad as he does sheep.

Now that I've written a description which would be worth money to any sheriff, I will proceed with this woful tale.

Telescope came out of that palace of vice and drifted homeward. We also drifted homeward and finds him setting on a bunk, looking like he'd lost his last friend. So far as we know, Telescope ain't got no best friend. When it comes to telling about his family and past history, Telescope Tolliver is some futurist. At times he brags a heap about Kentucky and admits he was born there, but nobody on the ranges of Yaller Rock County ever heard him say anything about his family history.

We surrounds him, pounces upon him from three sides and then sets upon his carcass while we secures that letter. Muley reads her out loud:

"Mister James Valiant Tolliver, Cross J ranch, Montana."

"My hero!" squeaks Chuck. "Go ahead with the disclosure, Muley."

"Ouch!" yelps Muley. "You hold the top end of the critter, Chuck—he bit me!"

"Aw-w-w-w, hurry up before you gets hydrophoby."

My Dear James:

Your success has been a source of great satisfaction to us, and we are looking forwards to seeing you this Summer. We will leave for a Western trip this week, and will wire if we decide to come that far north.

Your letters about your many acres, lowing kine and waving grain read like a passage from "Evangeline." It makes us mighty proud to feel that a Tolliver was able to build a place in the boundless West. Robert joins me in sending our congratulations. We feels that Clarice must be a wonderful wife, and I am proud to know that your first-born was named after your affectionate aunt,

Alicia.

Chuck slid gently to the floor and sets there, wiggling his ears, while Muley grabs the post of a bunk and wipes away his tears. Telescope sets up, tears up that letter and then tries to scratch a cigaret on his boot while he puffs on a match.

"My ——!" gasps Chuck. "His first-born! Lowing kine and——"

"You lied to me!" squeaks Muley. "You said you was sing-g-g-g-ul!"

"Liar!" I hisses. "You betrayed our trust, Valiant. You built without telling us. And we tr-r-r-r-usted you!"

"Oh-h-h-h, —— the whole bunch of you!" wails Telescope.

"Hear him?" yelps Muley. "He curses us. You long, hungry, prevaricating son-of-a-prairie-dog, ain't it enough for you to deceive us without adding profanity to your many crimes? You he-vampire!"

Muley swallers hard, shakes his fist at Telescope and recites:

"You made me love you like the coyote loves a sheep.
You told me that you loved no one but me.
You kissed me in the moonlight on the ri-i-i-ver,
You asked me for my heart and hand to keep.

"You lied to me; you said you'd wed me soon.
You had a wife and kid and lowing kine.
You broke your cinch with me—take back the ring;
I hate you like the coyote hates the moon."

Chuck fumbles in his pocket and produces the little bronze emblem.

"Take it, James Valiant. For lo, these many moons have I been the prize liar of Yaller Rock County, and defeat cankers my soul. It irks me sore, but I recognizes a peer. Be good to the little bull."

Chuck flaps his arms weary-like and sets down.

Just then Jay Bird comes up to the door.

"Say, you alleged cow-hands, can you mismanage this place for a while? I've got to go over to Billings."

He looks us over.

"What's the matter with the human rake-handle? Sick?"

"Yeah," nods Telescope. "Sick."

"Sure we can run the place," admits Muley.

"You can run it," says Jay Bird. "Anybody can run it; but I wants to feel that I'll at least have a branding-iron left when I come back."

"I'll hide one where nobody can find it," grins Muley.

"You might get busy on that new corral fence while I'm gone."

"We might," nods Chuck, "but chances are we won't."

"Well, anyway, you fellers are honest about it. See yuh later."

"Honest?" says Chuck after Jay Bird leaves. "Eh, Telescope?"

"I didn't think it of you, Telescope," says Muley sad-like. "You sure——"

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"Let him tell it," says I. "He's dying to get a load off his chest."

"Well," says Telescope, "I never amount-amounted to anything in Kentucky——"

"Why designate any certain locality?" asks Muley.

"Wait," says Chuck. "Hen, you get your banjo and play something soft and low. We gotta do this right."

"Shut up!" howls Telescope. "Dang it all, I can't tell nothing unless you act right. Make Chuck quit wiggling his ears. Now. My folks died when they was young. No, I died when they——"

"Now quit lying," advises Chuck. "You've hit a —— of a gait, Telescope, but no use busting all records."

"Well, blast it, my folks died when I was young; so I sort of hooks up with relatives. They said I was the black sheep of the Tollivers. They told me I was no good and that I'd land in the pen. They——"

"They was able to peek into the future all right," says I.

"Then I dug out. *Sabe?* I figured that some day I'd show 'em all up. I was going to hook a big pot some day and go back there, but seems like any time I got into a big pot I had three clubs and a pair of spades.

"They sort of gets to writing to me; so I decides that I'll string 'em by mail. Maybe I went too strong. I told 'em about getting me this cow-ranch, and they said I ought to get married.

"Next time I wrote I added marriage. Little later on they gets to talking about kiddies; so I adds a kid. Could 'a' got a kangaroo or a elephant just as easy, but they didn't suggest it."

"And they're coming out to see everything," says Chuck.

"Oh-h-h-h-h-h, ——, yes!"

"Thy sins have found thee out," pronounces Muley.

"My relatives will, too," groans Telescope. "I'm going to pack my war-sack and hit the trail."

"How old was you when you left there?" asks Chuck.

"Thirteen or fourteen, I reckon."

"Look like you do now?"

"Naw. Everybody said I was going to be a runt. Pshaw, they'd never know me now, but that don't make me no never mind. All they've got to do is ask questions."

"They got any money?"

"Gobs of it. Old man owned one of the biggest distilleries in the State. Yuh see, I figures that if I'm a success I'll get a cut of that roll some day—that's why I write to 'em. But now—blooey! I'm going."

"Say not so, James," grins Chuck. "You can lie, but you ain't got no imagination. Let me handle this, will you? Hen, are you and Muley willing to help?"

"I ain't going to impede you none," says I, and Muley nods.

"Whatcha aiming to do, Chuck?" asks Telescope.

"Make your lie look like Gospel. Trouble with you ordinary liars, you don't see ahead. You don't hear me contradicting myself, do yuh? I'm a able liar—which is a rare bird, and helpful in times like these."

"I ain't got no ranch," objects Telescope.

"I have," grins Chuck, "while the old man is away. I'm James Valiant Tolliver, a runt what never growed up. I don't know what in —— them lowing kine are, but I'll get some if there's any laying around loose."

Chuck beats it for the corral, and the rest of us sets there.

"He—he said he was me, and—and—" stammers Telescope.

"He will be," admits Muley. "That hump-nosed truth-juggler is wound up again, and if I was you I'd——"

"What?"

"Hide that little bronze bull, Telescope—if you want to keep it."

A LITTLE later we wanders up to the ranch-house and watches Chuck fog off down the road.

"I didn't figure they'd want to come plumb up here," wails Telescope. "That kid must 'a' caused it all. They didn't whoop when I told 'em about the ranch, and they didn't blow off no roofs when I told 'em I was married, but when they hears about that kid—whoo-o-o-ee!"

"I never did see a poor liar that had any nerve," says I. "They always weaken."

"Weaken! Who wouldn't? I had a chance to cut in on the family roll, and now I'll get nothing but abuse."

"Well," says Muley, "you do deserve scolding, Telescope."

Chuck came home that night and busts right into the bunk-house just as I'm cutting a jack off the bottom to win six bits, and spoils the whole scheme. I only

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needed one point to win, and I had that cinched.

"Got her all fixed," says he, grinning. "All hunky-dory. Telescope, you can hang around and count your inheritance."

"You might tell a feller—" begins Telescope.

"Nothing," declares Chuck. "You kicked a hole in the boat, and it was up to me to mend it before you got swamped. You took the honors away from me, tall cowboy, but I'm right on your trail."

Chuck pikes up toward the house with Telescope following behind like a hound pup, hankering for a bone of information. Me and Muley went down to the corral, where we puts in our spare time trying to induce a bad bronc to get used to a saddle.

We're enjoying the spectacle when we happens to glance up and see "Old Testament" Tilton climbing the fence. He's got on his Sunday clothes and is packing a boiled collar in his hand so it won't get dirty. We desists in our labors and climbs up to him.

"Howdy, Henry. Howdy, Lemuel," says he. "Sort of ungodly and wicked animile you're fussin' with, eh? Broncs are like men's souls thataway. They r'ars and tears against religion somethin' scandalous but once you gets 'em used to packing a load of Gospel, and bridlewise to Christianity, they're plumb docile for life."

"Reckon you're fairly well saddle-marked thataway, Testament," observes Muley.

"I dunno. Sometimes I reckon I'm the top-riding sinner of the outfit, Lemuel, and again I gets danged awful meek and lowly. I plays the system the best I can and coppers no bets. Where's Chuck?"

"Up at the house, I reckon."

"Primpin' up a little, eh?" grins the old sky-pilot. "Well, it only comes once in a man's life, unless he gits him a de-vorce. Glad I'm able to be of assistance."

He slides off the fence and weaves toward the house while me and Muley sets there and stares at each other.

"Unless he gets a de-vorce," says Muley foolish-like. "What in thunder does he mean, Hen?"

"I ain't no wee-gee board. How do you expect me to know? Anyway I'm follering a hunch that Chuck has lied again."

"Yet," corrects Muley, "just the same I'm going to go up there. I can look on, even if I don't feel like asking questions. Come on."

We finds Old Testament setting on the porch, and in the old man's rocker, filling it plumb full, is Hulda Hansen, the Triangle outfit's Swede cook. If you ever hear anybody speak of a "shapeless mass"—that's Hulda.

She blushes when we walk up.

"Hello, Hulda," says Muley. "How's all your folks?"

"Ay got von brudder over on de Vagon Veel o-outfit, and Ay got von onkle vich is dead, t'ank you."

"You're welcome. Did he die easy?"

"He vors powder-monkey on railroat, unt—unt smoked his pipe."

"Nothing easier," admits Muley, and just then Chuck and Telescope comes through the house and out on to the porch.

"Howdy, boys," says Old Testament, shaking hands with Chuck. "Miss Hansen didn't seem to *sabe* just when this was to be pulled off; so she asks me to come up here with her."

"Huh?" gasps Chuck, wiggling his ears. "Whatcha say?"

"Your marriage to Miss Hansen," says Testament. "She told me——"

"Lucky dog," says I, shaking hands with Chuck. "You sure——"

"Thank—aw, go to ——!"

Chuck yanks his hand away and grabs for his collar. Telescope starts to set down on the top step, but catches his heel and lit half-way down. Chuck gulps and stares at Hulda.

"Say something, Testament," gasps Chuck. "I—I don't think I heard you the first time."

"Ay coom oop to ved mit you," explains Hulda, and you could 'a' lit a match on her ears. "You say, 'Hoolda, Ay vish you to be my vife, 'unt Ay say to you——"

"O-o-o-o-o-oh, mamma mine!" wails Chuck. "Who-o-o-o-o-o-a! Come in the house a minute while I talk to you."

She yanks loose from that chair after Muley put his foot on the rocker, and the rest of us sets there and stares at nothing.

"Has Chuck been settin' up with her much?" asks Testament.

"O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-ow!" comes a shriek from the house. "Whoopee!"

Smash! Crash! Bang!

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HULDA HANSEN comes out of the front door with her hat down over one eye and the lone feather sticking straight up and half of Chuck's vest in her hand. She snorts at us, climbs a barb-wire fence, the same of which takes toll from her skirt, and goes off across the field, talking Swedish to herself and waving that piece of a vest like it was a flag of victory.

We watches her fade out of the picture and then we turns to the door, where Chuck is down on his hands and knees, peering around the corner. He's got a red scratch down the length of his nose, and around his neck is the frame that once held a picture of Dewey at Manila. He looks up at us like a bashful pup, and backs out of the frame.

"Ha—has she gone?" he asks.

Muley nods, and Chuck looks cross-eyed at his scratched nose.

"From what I've done observed," remarks Testament, "I'd opine that there ain't no pressing need of a marriage service around her."

"For a preacher," says Muley, "you has a lot of perception."

Testament wanders down to his buckboard and drives homeward.

"It don't pay to lie," says Muley, easing himself into the rocker. "Naw, sir, it sure don't. I knowed a feller once——"

"Aw, I didn't lie to her!" wails Chuck. "I explained to her that I wanted her to be my wife for a week. She acted like she knowed what I was driving at—dang her, but I reckon she never got anything but the proposal.

"When I took her back into the house I tries to explain the joke to her, but she—she——"

"Broke down and cried?" asks Muley.

"Yeah! Oh, yeah, like ——! She grabbed me and slammed me so hard against the wall that a picture fell down, and then she framed me with it."

"She'd make a durable wife for somebody," nods Telescope.

"Wife!" snorts Chuck. "She'd make a body-guard for the Regular Army."

"Shucks, I reckon I'll pack my war-sack and drift," says Telescope.

"Set down!" howls Chuck. "One swaller don't make a Summer."

"Whatcha want to annex a wife like Hulda for?" asks Telescope. "Can't yuh pick a good-looker to hang the name of Tolliver on to?"

"Don't be finicky, cowboy," says Chuck. "Here comes Ricky Henderson. Maybe he's got an idea."

"Maybe," admits Telescope. "Maybe he's just found out about your putting emery-dust in that sheepherder's whiskers. It plumb ruined every razor Ricky owned; and he swears he'll kill the man who put the kerosene in his bay-rum bottle."

"I'm a little messenger boy," grins Ricky, hunting through his pockets. "Got-ta telegram for James Valiant Tolliver. Me and the agent reads it, and then opines it must be for Telescope. You got any relation what is liable to visit yuh, Telescope?"

Ricky hunts through some more pockets and shakes his head.

"Had the darned thing when I started. Must 'a' lost it. Anyway it said something about arriving Saturday morning, and it was signed by—uh—uh—lemme, see——'

"A-a-alicia?" mutters Telescope.

"That's it. Alicia. Been looking for 'em, tall-feller?"

Telescope stares at Ricky foolish-like, and Ricky nods, "Honest to grandma, Telescope," and then he turns to us.

"What's the joke?"

Telescope starts for the bunk-house, waving his arms and talking to himself, while Ricky sets there on his bronc and grins. Muley tells him all about it, and Ricky is as pleased as a pup with a bone.

Ricky is a little dark feller who cuts hair for a living. He's one of them smooth-fingered *hombres* who keeps his hair greased until she looks like patent leather, and a joke on somebody else is meat and drink to his soul.

He listens to the whole tale and then hugs himself.

"I've got the idea," says he. "You never can get a female to play the part, but I know a male what can."

"Meaning which?" asks Muley.

"Ever see yours truly impersonate a female?"

"Good night!" yelps Muley. "Fare thee well, Molly darling."

"Think I can't do it? You watch my smoke, feller. I've got a yaller wig which was part and parcel of a defunct opery troupe, and if I can get me some female clothes—mamma mine! Get your bronc, Chuck."

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Them two schemers rides away while me and Muley sets there and listens to the suffering of Telescope Tolliver.

"Cod-liver oil and axle-grease properly mixed will cure any ills that mankind is heir to," orates Muley, "but it takes experience, bitter experience, to cure a liar. A feller can pack his gun handy and lie about his friends, but any old time he lies about himself——"

"Shut up!" howls Telescope. "Ain'tcha got no feelings?"

"Feel of me," grins Muley. "Wait until you see Chuck impersonating you, and Ricky, wearing a yaller wig, impersonating your female wife; you'll——"

"My——!"

Telescope looks at us wide-eyed.

"Ricky—going—to—be—my—wife?"

"In name only," says Muley. "You've got to have some wife, ain't you?"

Telescope groans and settles back. Muley squints at him, and recites:

"A liar there was and he told a lie,
Even as you and I;
The biggest lie you most ever saw;
It gave him a wife and made him a paw;
Now he weeps and wails and rubs his jaw,
And wonders and wonders why."

"Muley," says Telescope soft-like, "I'm going to kill you—some day."

"Hear him, Hen?" sobs Muley. "Ain't he the awful example? Going to add murder to his other crimes, eh? Liar, horse-thief, card-sharp, tenor singer, and now—murderer!"

A feller ain't always to blame for poor marksmanship, especially when he's laying down, but that didn't excuse Telescope. I was on the opposite side of the room from Muley, and Telescope never can make me believe that the boot-jack slipped out of his hand.

I dreamed that a little feller with a peaked cap and a long nose comes along packing a lantern. He shuffles up to me, peers into my face and shakes his head sad-like.

"Who you looking for?" I asks.

He shakes his head sad-like some more and says——

"I search for an honest man."

"Good hunting to you," says I. "You've got some chore."

Then I hears Muley's voice saying.

"Holy henhawks, I reckon I've got to make another trip. Danged if I'll mop up the place."

"Where's the little feller, Muley?" I asks.

"Telescope? He pulled out for town."

"Naw, I mean the little feller who looked for a honest man."

"Man, you must 'a' got hit hard. I never seen no little feller."

"You didn't need to dump half a bucket of water on me," says I, feeling of my wet self.

"Half a bucket? Blame your hide, Henry, I made three trips to the well. I had to anchor you to keep you from floating out of the door."

I doctored that lump on my head until she ain't bigger than a baseball, and then me and Muley spent the rest of the day resting—as usual. About ten o'clock that night we hears somebody ride in, and a little later Telescope's hat sails in the window and rolls into a corner. We don't say a word, and then we hears Telescope saying—

"Well, they didn't shoot at it nor kick it out, so I reckon I'll take a chance."

He comes in and sets down on a bunk.

"Chuck home yet?"

"Nope," says I.

"Mad at me, Henry?"

"Uh-huh."

"It slipped, Henry—tha's all. Muley made me mad. He's a mean son-of-a-gun."

"Yes," says I, "you both are. Tomorrow I'm going to buy me a steel helmet and a life-preserver. It's bad enough to have one of you slough me over the head without having the other step in and try to drown me."

I BEAT Muley and Telescope out of seventy dollars, conversation money, and then we went to bed. Must have been along about two o'clock when we hears voices singing; so I lights the lamp.

"No-o-o-o-o-bod-e-e-e-e-e knows how dry I a-a-a-a-a-a-am."

There is silence for a minute, and then another voice—

"I soaked my sho-o-o-o-o-o-es for drink 'f boo-o-o-o-o-o-ze."

And then both voices in barber-shop harmony—

"No-o-o-o-o-bod-e-e-e-e knows how dry I——"

I yanked the door open, and Chuck and Ricky, with their arms around each other's

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necks, falls inside. They blinks at the light for a moment, and then—

"A-a-a-a-a-a-a-am."

I blew out the light and left them on the floor. After a while I hears Chuck singing soft and low:

"Swee-e-e-e-e-t A-a-a-a-a-a-de-e-e-line, Swee-e-e-e-e-e-t A-a-a-a——

"Ricky! Ain'tcha goin't' help me? No? All ri', feller."

I got that whole gang up at five o'clock 'cause I knowed the train was due early. Chuck and Ricky are sore-headed, but they had enough left to make the world look brighter.

"I'm going away," declares Telescope. "Nobody can ever tell me that Ricky Henderson can make up like a female and fool anybody. I washes my hands of the whole thing. *Sabe?* If anybody asks me what I know about it I'll swear I don't know a thing."

"Sure you'll stay away," grins Chuck. "Think we want a big boob like you around to ball up things? You don't appreciate what we're doing for you, feller. All we ask is that you stay out of sight. *Sabe?*"

Telescope saddles up and drifts toward town ahead of us. We talks it all over and decides that Muley and Ricky are to stay at the ranch, while me and Chuck go down to meet the relation.

Ricky don't dare to go down there in his make-up, so Chuck says he'll tell 'em his wife is too frail to stand the bumping of a wagon. Ricky does look frail.

We went to the depot and found out that for once in its existence the train was on time. Mostly always you can go to town tomorrow and be in plenty of time to catch today's train.

"Say," says Paddy Wilkins the depot agent to me, "is Telescopic Tolliver foreman for Whittaker?"

"Say he was?" I asks.

"Yeah. Telegram comes for Whittaker, and I asks Telescope to take it out to him, but he says the old man is away, and, being in charge, he asks me to read it to him. When does the old man come back, Henry?"

"Cannon Ball comin'!" yells Chuck, and I don't get a chance to answer Paddy's question.

Chuck has borrowed Jay Bird's swaller-tailed coat and beaded-vest, and we stands there like a reception committee with our hats in our hands. It's too early for any Paradisers to be on hand.

"Where did you get a dress for Ricky?" I asks.

"We robbed the clothes-line at the Seven A," chuckles Mr. Warner's little son. "Annie Schmidt's clothes, Henry."

I nodded weakly and watches the train roll in. Ricky won't weigh over a hundred and twenty, and Annie Schmidt is at least two-fifty.

The first one to get off is a old pelican wearing thick glasses and a hard hat. Behind him comes a female of the vintage of sixty-three, and behind her comes one swell-looking female—young. Words fails me when I try to sing her charms.

The old man might 'a' owned one of the biggest distilleries, but I knowed at a glance why he didn't have it any more—he drank it all up. He sure has a nose that shows.

The old lady is one of them haughty old females who are too proud to look at their feet, and her neck is so long that she could wear a fur muffler and a sweater and still be low-necked.

We stumbles up to them as the train pulls out. The old man peers at us and says——

"I am looking for James——"

"Yessir," grins Chuck. "I'm him."

"You!" says he. "Well! I wouldn't 'a' knowed you at all."

"James," says the old lady, "I'm pleased to meetcha. You may kiss me on the cheek."

Chuck was game.

"This is your cousin Molly," says the old lady. "You've likely never even heard of her, James, but she's a lovely girl, and we know you'll like her."

"Y'betcha," grins Chuck.

Molly was more human than auntie, and Chuck kisses her.

"Well, James, I'd have never knowed you," says uncle. "Of course it has been a long time since we were together. You've done well, eh? Surprized to see us, eh?

"Never expected to see you, James. Molly, here, is Polly's girl. You remember Albert Benefield, don't you?"

"Al Benefield? Sure I do. Is that son-of-a gun alive yet?"

"He is my father," says Molly.

"Oh!" gasps Chuck, and almost falls over a valise. "Here, Henry, you rustle these valises out to the wagon."

And then he says—

"Just wait until you see my wife."

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"James!" exclaims auntie. "Where is she?"

"She's home. You see, she's too delicate to bounce around in a wagon."

They all rambles for the wagon, all talking to once, and I'm glad I don't have to answer any questions.

Telescope got lit up. I reckon the strain was too much; so he gets his skin full of weeping-water. While we climbs into the wagon he comes out of the Happy Days, lets out a war-whoop and tries to lean against a post of the saloon porch.

That part of it was all right. A feller has a perfect right to lean against a post if he wants to, and maybe it's nobody's business if the post ain't there—but it looks bad.

"How perfectly ridiculous!" exclaims Cousin Molly. "He's so tall."

"Sh-h-h-h-h-h!" cautions Chuck. "That's 'Hell-Fire' Jones, the worst horse-thief unhung."

"Oh, a real Western bad-man?"

"The worst," nods Chuck. "Jesse James was an evangelist beside him. He ain't got no honor at all. Why, that *hombre* will—uh—lie."

"By gad, the law should deal with the likes of him," says uncle.

"Law? Shucks, what can they do? He won't admit any crimes. Get right up on the witness stand and lie out of everything."

Just then I happens to think of something. I kicks Chuck on the ankle.

"The baby!" I hisses in his ear.

"Oh, yes, I forgot about the baby," says he foolish-like, out loud.

"The baby," echoes auntie. "The——"

"Sus-some kid," says Chuck. "Yessir, Clarence is some baby."

"A boy baby?" asks uncle, and I kicks Chuck again.

"N-n-no," stammers Chuck. "You see, it's thisaway: We—uh—calls her Clarence for short. *Sabe?*"

"Why?" asks auntie.

"You see," says Chuck, staring over where Telescope is sitting on the sidewalk, "my wife is crazy about boy babies. She ain't a bit well, and she wanted a boy baby so danged bad that we frames up on her, and names it Clarence and so, you see, she don't know——"

"Do you mean that your wife thinks it is a boy?" gasps auntie.

"Dog-gone it, we had to do something," wails Chuck. "You see, she ain't just right in the head, and we thought we'd let her think——"

"Well," says Cousin Molly, "I think it was awful good of you."

"Thanks," sighs Chuck. "I'm glad somebody appreciates it."

"I feel sure that she must be a lovely girl, and it's nice of you men to see things in that light. Is she a little woman?"

"Yeah. Pretty as a picture. Got yaller hair. Doc Milliken has done all he can, but you can't expect much help from a horse-doctor."

"She ought to have a long rest," opines uncle.

"Uh-huh," agrees Chuck. "That's what the sheriff sa'd."

"Well," says uncle, "I suppose we may as well proceed to the farm. I feel sorry for you, James, and more sorry for your unfortunate wife, and I wish you better luck in the selection of an offspring next time."

"The idea!" snaps auntie. "He had nothing to do with it."

"No," says Chuck. "Gawd knows that's the truth."

They sure knows how to ask questions.

"Do you own all this country?" asks auntie, indicating everything from the Canadian border to Wyoming.

"Uh-huh," admits Chuck. "Going to fence it some of these days and see if I can keep track of my lowing kine."

"Lowing kine?" asks auntie, looking around. "Where are they?"

Chuck turns and wiggles his ears at me.

"Where are they, Henry?"

"Don't pass the buck to me," says I. "I ain't got 'em."

JUST then we sees an Injun coming down the road. It's old Two-Sleeps, riding his pinto to a frazzle. He skids up in a cloud of dust, throws up one skinny arm and yells:

"Hyah! *Tenas tsolo!* Wah!" And away he goes, off down the road.

Chuck wiggles his ears at me and brushes some dust off his nose.

"What in the world did he say?" asks auntie.

"He said," says Chuck, "he said that the Aparejo Indians were on the war-path again."

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"Is he one of them?" asks uncle anxious-like.

"Him? Naw; he's a Tapidero. Reckon we better get to the ranch."

"Does it—it hurt to get scalped?" asks uncle as we bounce along.

"Not after you get used to it," says I. "Very few people ever complain about the pain."

I didn't quite *sabe* what the Injun said, but it was something like "small lost," whatever that might be. We drove up to the front of the ranch-house and begins unloading the plunder.

"You've a comfortable-looking home, James," admits auntie.

"Uh-huh; I sure have. I spent a lot of—my——!"

I looks at the door and blinks my eyes three times, but it won't go away. There is Muley Bowles with a yaller wig on his fat head and one of them polky-dot Mother Hubbard dresses on. In one fat hand he's got a peacock-feather fan.

Chuck's knees wabble and he kneels right down at the foot of the steps and looks up at her—him—like one of them pictures of a Buddha-worshiper.

I leaned on a wheel and slid flat on the ground, while the relation sure got both eyes full. I'd tell a man that Muley is some female.

"Well!" gasps auntie, who beats us all out on vocal vitality. "Is—is—this——"

"Uh-huh," says Muley in a high voice. "It is."

"By gad!" I hears uncle gasp. "If she's frail——"

"So this is James's wife," says auntie awed-like, fanning herself with her hand. "I—I—It must be the heat."

"Well, anyway, we are glad to meet you," says Cousin Molly, shaking Muley's hand. "James said that you——"

"Don't mind him," says Muley. "He's the dangdest——"

"You folks better go inside," says I. "It's too hot here in the sun."

Ricky slips in beside me and whispers in my ear—

"That dress was about seven feet too wide for me, Hen, and Muley had to be her."

"Were you joking about your wife?" asks Molly, shaking her finger at Chuck.

"Well," says Chuck weak-like, "let your judgment be your guide."

"Now," says auntie, "I want to see that wonderful child."

"Child," parrots Chuck. "Oh, ye-e-e-e-s, the child. Uh—uh——"

"Coming up," says Ricky soft-like, pointing at the door to the kitchen.

Chuck wets his lips and rubs his hand across his face. I don't blame him.

Standing there in the door, sucking at the top of a battered molasses can, is a dirty little Injun kid about three years old. Right then I remembers old Two-Sleeps's words, "*Tenas tsolo.*" He meant "Lost kid." Them snake-hunters have kidnapped his papoose.

"How—how old is—uh—it?" asks uncle foolish-like.

"Th-three mum-months," breaths Chuck.

"By gad, they mature young!"

"Uh-huh," grunts Chuck, wiggling his ears real fast. "Don't you think he looks like her mother?"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Ricky. "Don't he look——"

But I kicks him on the ankle and rushes him outside.

"Ain't you got a lick of sense?" I inquires. "Muley looks about as much like a female as a humming-bird looks like an elephant. That was one fine idea, swiping that Injun kid."

"Aw, that's nothing, Hen. Old Two-Sleeps has so many kids that he won't miss this one for a week. Seen anything of Telescope?"

"Soused in Paradise."

"Muley got three bird-shot in his knee when we swiped that dress. Of course we had to stop and sing a song, and some fool at the Seven A dusted us with a shotgun. It was a cinch to swipe that kid."

I don't say a word, but just the same I wonders how Ricky's patent-leather hair is going to look hanging up in a teepee.

Then uncle comes out and pilgrims down to us.

"By gad, I like this place of James's," says he. "Like to own one like it."

"Maybe you could buy it," says I.

"Yes, I might. James has offered to sell me half interest."

"Half?" I gasps, and then me and Ricky gawps at each other.

"Yes, sir, and at a bargain, too. By the way, you mentioned something about the Indians being on the war-path."

"War-path?" says Ricky. "Injuns?"

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"Uh-huh," says I. "Two Sleeps-went past us like a bat out of —— and yells, *'Tenas tsolo!'*"

Ricky *sabes* Chinook. He revolves the statement over in his mind and blinks his eyes fast.

"By the way," says uncle, "is it—er—true that James's wife is—er—a bit touched in the head?"

"Bit!" snorts Ricky. "She's crazy as a shepherd. Her heart is all right, but she sure is rickety on top."

"Don't you think she's sweet?" I asks.

"Well," says uncle slow-like, "I am not a corner sewer so I'd hate to answer. Anyway I believe in letting every one have their own opinions."

"Neither do I," says Ricky, and just then Chuck and the two women come out of the house.

"We are going to look around the farm," says Cousin Molly.

"Ex-cuse me," says I. "I've got work to do."

"I do not think we need the services of the hired help," says auntie haughty-like.

Ricky thinks he's smart. He makes a motion like he was throwing a rope, stoops over, makes a few more motions and then throws up one hand. Chuck grabs out his watch, snaps it back into his pocket and wiggles his ears.

"A world's record!" he gasps. "One second flat."

He meant I had been roped and hog-tied in one second.

"Gracious!" exclaims auntie. "What does that mean, James?"

"That?" gulps Chuck. "Why that's the—uh—sympathy sign of the Sacred order of Slingers. Henry is the High Priest of the Hemp-Handlers."

I takes off my hat to Chuck with four fingers outspread and the thumb to the rear, and then I wanders back toward the house, where Hop Louey the Chink cook is watching the sight-seeing bunch.

"Where them folks come flum?" he asks.

"I don't know, Hop."

"How long stay?"

"Maybe all Summer."

"Goo'-by!"

Hop wipes his face on his sleeve.

"No good. Too much flemale, you *sabe?* I no cook fo' flemale—too much kick. Maybe I go San Flancisco—goo'-by."

"I guess you won't!" snaps a voice behind us, and we turns to see Muley.

For once in his life that Oriental shows emotion. He stares at Muley for a moment and then starts backing away. His lower jaw seems to joggle every time his heels hit the ground, and as soon as he figures he's got a chance he whirls and runs, with Muley right behind him.

Muley is handicapped by that skirt, but I figures that Hop is too blamed shocked to make it a long race. They went right through the inspection party at the corner of the corral and off into the mesquite like a Great Dane chasing a cotton-tail.

It sure was some shock to the sight-seers. They seems to talk it over a bit, and then uncle strides up to me.

"Has she had a turn for the worse?" he asks.

I starts to say something when here comes Muley. He's got his hand wrapped in the slack of Hop's panties and is packing him like he was a valise. He stands Hop on the porch and gives him a shove.

"Inside!" he roars. "You —— fool, we've got company!"

Hop didn't argue. His pigtail don't no more than disappear when we hears him whanging tinware to beat four of a kind. I can see Chuck talking with both hands, while Ricky leans against the corral fence and seems to nurse cramps in his stummick.

I'VE had about enough. When they comes my way I circles the herd and climbs to safety on the top pole of the corral. I sure feels sorry for the little feller with the lantern.

I've been there long enough to smoke two cigarets when here comes uncle. He's got a black eye, and the rest of his face registers revolution.

"Did you see where he went?" he asks, peering up at me.

"Did he have a lantern?" I asks.

"Lantern?"

Uncle rubs his eye.

"He—he did not."

"To me you are speaking of which?" I asks.

"That Henderson person. I—I apprehended him in the act of hugging James's wife!"

"My——!" says I. "He must be crazy."

"Crazy? By gad, I think the whole country is crazy. I told James about it

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and he actually grew hysterical. I pointed out the enormity of it all, and he cried—actually cried, by gad!"

"And then he busted you in the eye?"

"James? No, the—I could see that James's nerves were in no condition to uphold the honor of the family; so I took it upon myself. I went to this Henderson person and I said to him—

" 'Sir, in the name of my family I demand satisfaction.' "

"He said—

" 'Sorry, but we haven't any today.'

"I said—

" 'You have offered an insult to my brother, and I resent it.' "

"Then you had a fight?"

"I said to him, 'Only blows can wipe out the stain,' and he said, 'Uncle, I'm sorry, but if you insist——'

"And then he embraced me and bumped me twice in the eye. I had no chance to retaliate, but by gad I am not yet *hors de combat.*"

"Stick with that razor-rassler and you will be, old-timer," says I as I watches him toddle back to the house.

There's something familiar about that old coot, but I can't figure out where it is.

Then I sees Chuck sneaking around the corner of the fence. He wiggles his ears at me, peers at the house and then climbs up to have a quiet smoke.

"James," says I, "you've rised—and put a chunk under it."

"Uh-huh."

"Ricky hit the old gent in the eye."

"Yeah, with his head. The old coot wanted to fight a deathly doodle. He caught Ricky and Muley hugging each other. Haw! Haw! Haw!

"Aw, Henry, it's one awful mess. There's only two beds in the house. See what I mean? Uncle and auntie in one; Cousin Molly in the other, and no place for Chuck and his wifie.

"Can't sleep in the bunk-house with the riffraff. Molly says that I can sleep with the boys."

"Well," says I, "it ain't night yet. Lots of things can happen."

"They likely will, Henry."

"Just about what do they think of your wife and child?"

"Think? They think that my wife is loco, and they're humoring her to beat ——, while that blamed Piegan kid talks infant Injun to all of them. If I had Telescope here I'd bust his wish-bone."

"Zasso? Zasso?"

We turns and looks down at Telescope.

"Would, eh? Try it, feller. I'm a uncurried wolf and I've come to howl."

I can see that he's suffering from a double-loaded jag. He must 'a' got good and full and then sobered half-way, after which he built up another one. It's like putting both loads in one barrel of a muzzle-loading gun. It sort of leaves an air-space between, and when she goes off—something busts, sure as ——.

"Aw, have a little sense," grunts Chuck. "Get meek, feller; get meek."

"Zasso? Zasso? You don't shay. Well, well!"

"Aw, go soak your head!" snaps Chuck, "Crawl into a hay-stack and get sober."

"Zasso? Who're you to order me round? M' conscience hurts me. Goin' up to th' house. *Sabe?* Go 'head and stop me, feller. Got conscience, y'betcha."

"He's got a conscience, Chuck," says I. "Let him go. Somebody's got to spill the beans pretty soon anyway."

Telescope nods foolish-like and weaves toward the house.

"Good night," sighs Chuck. "Muley may as well put on his pants."

Telescope is almost to the house when he stops.

"Look!" gasps Chuck. "My ——, he's got the shotgun!"

Uncle steps through the door and yells at Telescope:

"Stop, Hell-Fire Jones! Stop, or I'll fire."

Telescope stops and rocks on his heels.

"Fire, will yuh?" he wails. "Zasso? Well, well!"

"Indeed I will, sir."

"Good," grunts Telescope. "Fire when ready, 'cause I may do little shootin' myshelf."

Telescope was too drunk to hit anything. He saw three men and forgot to shoot at the one in the middle. The first barrel of that shotgun tore a hunk out of the eaves of the porch, and the next one pattered shot on the bunk-house window.

Telescope's first shot went through the kitchen stove-pipe and the next one busted a window in the kitchen. I seen Hop Louey go out of the back door with the slack of his pants in one hand and a

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fry-pan in the other, while Telescope took his gun in both hands and shot four holes in the ground between him and the porch.

"Zasso?" he yelps when his gun is empty. "Goin' to fire, eh? How do you like it as far as you've gone, eh?"

Just then Muley walks out to the door, leading that dirty-faced Injun kid by the hand. They walks up in front of Telescope and stops.

"Look out, Clarice!" howls uncle. "That's Hell-Fire!"

Telescope seems to swaller hard, and then shakes his head.

"Tha's all right," says he. "Tha's all right. Gawd knows I'll welcome pro'bishun with open arms. Oh, I cer'ly will, believe me."

"I am Mrs. James Valiant Tolliver, and this is little Alicia," states Muley.

"Oh, tha's all right," says Telescope. "Per-fec-lee all right. I'm goin' to try and get out before anybody sees me, ma'am. Had nice time at your party, and I wish thee a fond fare-thee-well. *Adios*, *klahowya* and so-long."

Telescope turns and walks like a man asleep. He goes right down to the horse-trough, where he tries to get a drink. It's perfectly all right for a man to lean over and drink out of a trough—if he's a contortionist, but Telescope wasn't.

We fished him out and put him on his bronc.

"You ought to quit drinking," says Chuck sad-like.

"Zasso?" splutters Telescope. "Your advice came too late, feller. I quit jus' before the boat went down."

THEN cometh auntie. It's a cinch she's got something on her mind. "I won't stand for it another minute!" she wails. "Such goings-on I've never seen before, James. That friend of yours hit your uncle in the eye when he accused him of kissing Clarice, and now this unmentionable Jones person fires upon us. It is awful!"

Auntie stands there and pants with indignation.

"James, I fear you did not tell us all in your letters."

"Well," says Chuck, wiggling his ears, "you're entitled to your own opinions, but I'd say that you've been told too —— much."

"James," says she severely, "how old is little Alicia?"

"Old? Th-three or four months, I reckon.

"You reckon, do you? She has all of her teeth."

"Yes'm," weakly. "She's a careful child."

"James, you are lying to me. That child is at least three years old."

"Yes'm."

"How long have you been married?"

"Three or fuf-four months."

"Great Heavens! James!"

"Honestly," says Chuck, wiggling his ears.

"Honestly! Oh, this is awful!" and auntie fades back toward the house.

"Chuck," says I, "you'll have to admit that you got your dates mixed that time."

"Temporarily," admits Chuck. "I'm going to need your help, Henry."

"You won't get it. I'm going to town. *Sabe?* Telescope is my beloved friend and all the trimmings, but I still got too much respect for my immortal soul to put it in hock forever."

"Aw-w-w-w! Ricky quit me, and now you renegs. He said he was willing to do anything for Telescope's sake, but said he can't forget the emery-dust and the kerosene.

"Well, go on. I've still got a wife and a child, and duty makes me stay."

He flops his arms resigned-like, and watches me fade toward town.

I finds Telescope draped over a bar, trying to tell something to Jay Bird Whittaker, who ain't supposed to be there at all.

"Henry," says Jay Bird soft-like, "what is Telescope talking about?"

"I don't read minds in the daytime," says I. "I was educated in a night school."

"He's begged my pardon ten times," wonders Jay Bird, "and his wau-wau is so mixed that I can't find out why. Where's Muley?"

"I don't know. He ain't been himself since you left."

"Ain't, eh? Where's Chuck?"

"Oh, he's lying around some place."

"That's a cinch. What have you done since I left?"

"Me? Huh, I—I been watching that branding-iron."

Jay Bird takes a deep breath and gets tears in his eyes. He sure does appreciate things.

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"Thanks, Henry," says he. "You sure look after my interests."

"Ain't you back sooner than you expected?"

"How long do yuh think I want to stay in the wicked city? Believe me, Henry, I get back as soon as possible; back to the open country, where men's souls are clean and their hearts are pure. Yeah? Back to honest men—men you can trust. I hope you ain't forgot where you hid that branding-iron."

"Going out to the ranch?"

"Just as soon as I can hitch up."

I grabbed my bronc and got away ahead of him. I figures to tell Chuck and Muley and let them use their own judgment, but my bronc hits a gopher-hole when I'm cutting corners and I has to lead it the last mile.

I went into the back door just as Jay Bird drives up in front. The whole gang is in there, and I hears Chuck gasp:

"Holy henhawks! Here comes Jay Bird. Get ready to sing."

"Sing?" says auntie. "Sing what?"

"Anything, anything!" groans Chuck. "Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast."

"Is—is he savage?" asks uncle, leaning over toward that shotgun.

"Worst yuh ever seen," whispers Chuck. "Don't even think of a gun."

Jay Bird stamps up on to the porch and pokes inside the door, where he stares at the assemblage. Jay Bird ain't much older than the rest of the Cross J outfit, but he's fiercer-looking by several fierces.

From uncle's throat comes, soft and low—

"The-e-e-e sun shines bright on my o-o-o-old Ken-tuck-e-e-e-e-e ho-o-o-o-o-me."

"I'm co-o-o-o-o-o-ming, I'm co-o-o-o-o-mming, and my head is bending lo-o-o-o-o-w," wails auntie with her nose in the air.

"I am no-o-o-o-o-o bod-e-e-e-e-e's dar-r-r-r-r-ling, nobody cahares for me-e-e-e-e-e,' adds Chuck sad and low, hanging on to the notes like a hungry pup to a dish-rag.

Jay Bird stares at everybody and then scratches his head.

"We-e-e-e-e-p no more my lady," wails uncle, hooking his immortal soul on to them words.

"I hear the angel voices ca-a-a-a-a-lling, O-o--o-o-old Black Joe," weeps auntie, plumb off the tune by this time.

"Gol A'mighty!" gasps Jay Bird, wide-eyed. "Gol A'mighty, it must be me. It's more reasonable to reckon that I'm crazy than to think all that bunch is."

He looks us over again and then gets mad.

"Shut up that howling! For ——'s sake, shut up! If I'm crazy I'm crazy, but I ain't dead yet! Gol dingle dang——"

Then he gets a good look at Muley with the papoose on his lap.

"Go ahead and sing," he croaks. "What the —— do I care?"

"Ay am O-o-o-olaf," states a voice behind him, and there stands a big *hombre* with a taffy-colored mustache, little blue eyes and a pair of hands that look like prize hams.

"Ay am O-o-o-olaf," says he again.

"All right," says Jay Bird hoarse-like. "If I've got to listen to a Swede song I reckon I can. Man in my condition can stand anything."

"Ay don't sing—Ay fight," announces Olaf.

"Oh," says Jay Bird. "Bull, booze or prize?"

"Ay am fighter, you bet your life. Ay coom har to knock —— out for somebody. My seester Hoolda say somebody say to her—

" 'Hoolda, I like for marry you.'

"Hoolda say—

" 'Sure.'

"Den Hoolda coom to marry oas feller, and he say to her:

" 'You mistake about das. Ay vish to have you, but no'ting doing mit preachers. Ay am har to knock —— from dat man—me."

"Jay Bird," says Jay Bird, "you're crazy or asleep. Pretty soon you'll wake up and——"

"The redskin!" yelps uncle.

Right at the bottom of the steps stands Two-Sleeps with his war-bonnet down over one eye and a mean look on his face. He's been taking patent medicine or vanilla extract until he's flavored from stem to gudgeon, and in his hands is an old Sharps buffalo gun. He stands there teetering in his old moccasins with his lower jaw hanging loose.

"Ay vish to see de man Ay coom to fight," states Olaf.

"Very peculiar," says Jay Bird foolish-like, looking from the Injun to the Swede and then at us. "Singers, fighters and war-whoops."

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"Potlatch nika tenas!" whoops Two-Sleeps, which means, "Give me my kid."

He shoves his war-bonnet back on his head and scowls at us.

"Yatso tl'klope wau-wau!"

"My —— !" breathes Chuck. "The Hair Cut told him. Dang Ricky!"

Two-Sleeps jams his bonnet down over the other eye and takes a good grip on that gun.

"Nika mamook memaloot!" he whoops, which gently informs us that he's going to kill somebody.

"What he say?" asks Olaf. "Da Inchun."

"He says he didn't intend to marry Hulda," replies Chuck.

I read once about the Vikings roaring into battle—and I believe they did. Olaf lets it percolate into this thick head, lets out a lung-busting yell and gallops straight for the poor Indian.

Two-Sleeps belies his name. I've never seen a sober Injun that had anything on him when it comes to speed. That aborigine sure hit the back trail, whooping his discomfort every time he hit the earth, and right behind him comes the avenger.

They gallop straight for the bunk-house corner. I seen Olaf stoop in his stride and pick up a wagon-spoke, and just as the Injun is about to cut the corner Olaf sticks his heels into the dirt, raises the spoke and lets it go.

IT WAS a mighty heave. Opinions differ as to how far a human being could throw a wagon-spoke, but I think that Olaf's would stretch into first place if nothing had interfered; but just then Telescope rides around the corner humped up in the saddle, and when the Injun ducked under the bronc the spoke hit Telescope between the bridge of his nose and the brim of his hat.

Telescope is hit so hard that he don't even shiver. The bronc goes into the air, whales away at the Injun with both hind feet and then bucks straight for Olaf.

Olaf beat them to the fence, where the bronc whirls and bucks back toward the house, but Olaf didn't know that. In his mind was stamped a picture of that outfit coming at him, high and handsome, and he forgot his sister's honor; forgot everything except self-preservation, and keeps right on galloping.

It took that animal about two hops and snort to get back to us. I threw my hat at it and hit Telescope in the face with it as he comes over the porch-rail. The bronc took one post with him and bucks out of sight behind the corral.

Telescope came among us on the wing, knocks uncle's feet out from under him and left him hanging over the railing like a blanket. Telescope came to a full stop with his back against the wall and his mind far, far away.

Uncle hangs there and stares at Telescope wondering-like.

"Hell-Fire!" he gasps.

"And damnation," adds Jay Bird foolish-like.

Then he turns to us.

"Muley, you danged fool, take off that wrapper and put on your pants!

"Who in —— brought that dirty Injun kid up here?"

"Muley? Injun kid?" says auntie awed-like. "Why—why——"

"Just—wait—a—minute—please," says uncle, taking lots of time between words. "Who is that man?"

"Your nephew," says I. "Telescope Tolliver. It—it was a joke."

"Joke? I see. I have no nephew named Tolliver."

"You—you wired him," argues Chuck. "You said——"

"I—I sent a telegram to James B. Whittaker," says uncle. "I——"

"Whoa!" yelps Jay Bird. "Who are you?"

"I am Robert Todd. I——"

"My uncle Bob?" squeaks Jay Bird. "Why, dog-gone——"

An hour later four cow-punchers, out of work, and a barber walked into Abe Mason's blacksmith shop at Paradise. Abe was putting toe-calks on a pair of shoes, and the fire was hot.

"Abe," says Chuck, "can we perform a little sacrifice in your fire?"

"Sacrifice?" asks Abe. "Mebby. What's the joke?"

"No joke," says Chuck. "Jokes are ancient history."

"No more emery-dust or kerosene?" asks Ricky.

"Never," says Chuck. "Now, how did it happen, Telescope?"

"Aw, I found an old letter to Jay Bird from Todd, and he said he was figuring on

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coming up here, and then Paddy told me about that telegram, and—and—you danged snake-hunters was too smart. *Sabe?* I got Ricky to write that letter and we framed up on the telegram. I left it mostly to Ricky, 'cause I—I don't know nothing about lying."

"No," admits Muley. "No, that's a fact, Telescope; but may the Lord have mercy on the rest of us if you ever learns how."

"Give me that little bronze critter, Telescope," says Chuck.

"It's mine, ain't it?" wails Telescope. "Won it fair, didn't I?"

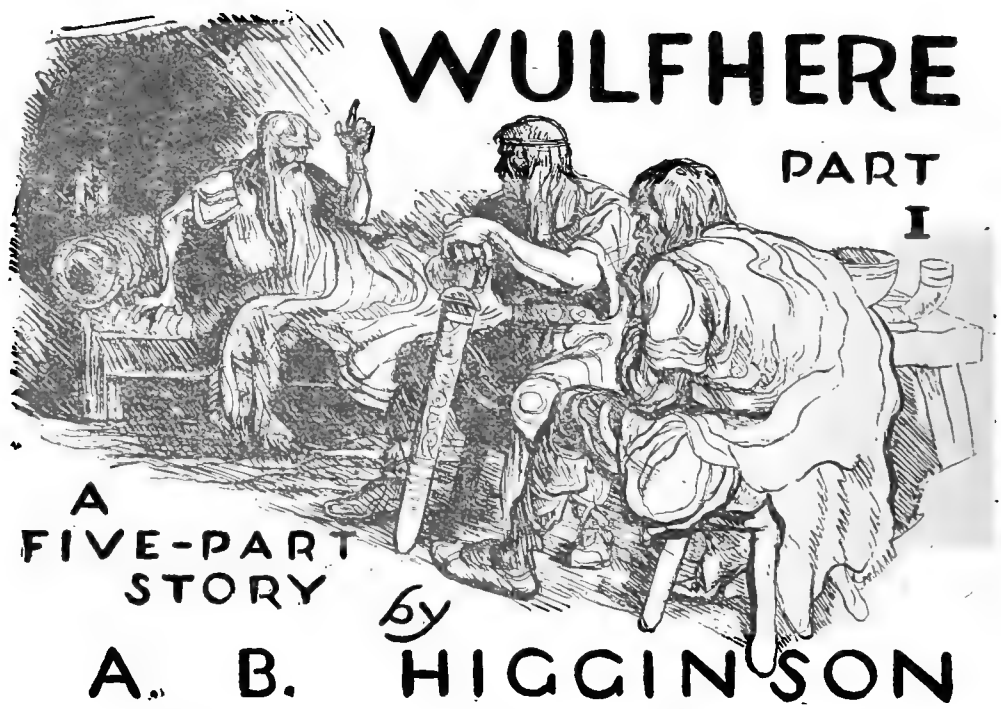
"Gimme that animal!" snaps Chuck. "Hand it to me, feller!"

Telescope digs it out of his pocket and hands it to Chuck, who drops it into that forge and pumps the bellows.

"Hats off," commands Muley. "Attention, prevaricators, and listen:

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust,
Tell the truth always—lie if you must;
But remember this lesson, ye teller of lies,
Who strive to excel to win ye a prize;
A regular liar is nothing to fear,
'Cause every one knows he's lying by ear;
But the *hombre* who's honest, upright and true,
Whose wau-wau is straight as Gospel to you,
When it comes to lying—he's right there with bells,
Even liars will believe everything that he tells."

And the little feller with the long nose and the lantern must 'a' grinned to himself.



WULFHERE

PART I

A FIVE-PART STORY by A. B. HIGGINSON

CHAPTER I

HOW TWO TRAVELERS FOUND EDBERT, SON OF EORPWALD

IT WAS the year of our Lord, 691. The air was damp and chilling, and the snow lay deep and heavy on every side. What once had been a forest of fir now could hardly be called a forest; it was but a wide stretch of country covered with a thick undergrowth of elm and poplar and oak, while towering high above them were the tall white skeleton-branches of the dead fir-trees. What had once been a road through this forest was now so choked up with brush and branches that it was no longer a road, only a rough track that any traveler who went that way might have had difficulty in following.

That the rude track was little frequented

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could be seen by the fact that though the storm which had brought the snow that now lay upon it had come and gone two days before, yet not a human footprint could be seen anywhere. Along the track there were signs that once on a time not a few people had lived thereabout, for log huts and stone houses and farm buildings lay in ruins on the edge of every open space that had at one time been a field or a farm.

A more desolate-looking region it would have been hard to find. Surely some grim destroyer had been there, and passed on, leaving what once had been a fair place, a charred unsightly ruin.

Two men were plodding wearily along this dreary, untrodden track on their way to Elmham in East Anglia. The one about forty years of age was very tall—six feet and a half he must have been—and he held himself erect even in his weariness. He was of massive build, with broad shoulders, muscular arms and legs, a man of splendid physique, something between a Hercules and an Apollo. His long fair hair fell in ringlets to his shoulders, and his kindly open face was given a warlike appearance by a great mustache whose long ends twirled back even to his ears.

He was clad in plain brown Saxon garb, simple but rich for the time, consisting of a loose-fitting tunic belted at the waist, and trousers around which from ankle to thigh was wrapped a ribbon of heavy yellow tape, according to the fashion of the time, to keep the warm garment close to the skin; while a long loose brown mantle fastened by a large silver buckle at the left shoulder hung over his back.

From his belt hung a tremendous sword in its sheath, one that only a very strong man such as he was who wore it could handle. On his head he wore a Saxon helm of glittering steel, and under his tunic, visible only about his neck and thighs, a mailed shirt. His bearing was stately and full of dignity and grace, and his every movement showed him to be of royal race.

At his side, perhaps half a pace behind, walked a man who might have been sixty-five years old. His beard and his hair were grizzled and curly, and his brows hung heavy over his eyes. He was not as tall as the first, not by half a head, but it required no second look to see that great strength lay in his supple body.

He was clad in precisely the same kind of garb as the other—brown tunic, trousers and mantle, mail shirt and steel helm—and at his side hung a heavy sword.

They trudged on in silence for a while; then the younger halted, and pointing straight ahead he cried:

"See, there is a light, thanks be to God!"

The sun had set, and the darkness was creeping about them. The wind had risen and was gathering strength as the time went by; it was plain that a storm was brewing. Already the air was much colder, and a few drops of half-frozen rain were falling. The travelers gathered their mantles close about them and plodded on.

They quickened their pace though they were very weary. Fiercer and fiercer the wind blew about them, and the air was biting cold. Soon they were wet to the skin, and even with all their exertions to get forward they began to be chilled to the bone. Always they tried to keep their eyes on the light that flickered in the now fast-falling sleet. Again and again they lost it, then found it again, and in the gathering blackness struggled along the track now scarcely discernible. They were two weary men who stood at last at the door of the rude hermitage, and knocked with their swords for admission.

A faint voice bade them enter.

THEY pushed open the door and the two walked into the hut. It was a humble enough dwelling, but scrupulously clean and neat. A log burned in the open hearth and a rush-light flickered by the window. A rough table stood in the middle of the room, on which were some dishes, most of whose contents had seemingly but lately been eaten, as only scraps remained. Half a dozen chairs were scattered about, and in the far end of the room was a bed.

On the bed—his head and shoulders propped up with pillows—lay an old man. Very old he must have been, for his hair and his beard were white as snow, and his face was thin and withered. His left hand hung over the side of the bed, while with the other he shaded his eyes as if to see more clearly who his guests might be. The two men noticed that his left hand was white like the hand of a leper, and a little more than skin and bone.

"Welcome, friends, to this poor house," the old man said in a weak voice. "Pardon

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me for not rising to wait on you, but illness has taken hold on me and for six weeks now I have kept to my bed."

"Is there none here to attend thee?" asked the younger stranger.

"Aye, I have a boy who comes to me morning and evening," the hermit answered. "He prepares my food and he lights my fire. Soon I shall have no need even of a boy, for the shadow of death is upon me and in a short time my poor, sinful soul must stand before Christ, its maker. Pray for me, friends, pray for me. But ye must be wet and cold. See, there is a little chamber"—and he pointed across the room to a door there—"enter that chamber and ye will find dry clothing, such as it is. Put it on and hang your wet garments here by the fire."

They thanked the old man and did as he directed, then warmed themselves at the hearth.

"Ye must be hungry also, my guests," the old man went on. "Yonder ye will find a pantry with meat and milk. Take what you want."

They found a pitcher of goat's milk, several meal cakes, some venison and two smoked hams. A good slice of the venison they roasted on the fire and ate, for they were very hungry, but they forbore to take of the milk and the cakes for they would not rob the old man of that which they knew he most needed. They quenched their thirst from a bucket of spring water that stood by the back door of the hut, then feeling much refreshed they sat down by the bed of the hermit and talked far into the night.

"Ye have not told me who ye are or whence ye have come," the old man said, "but neither do I ask you."

"We are lords of Mercia, father," the tall man answered.

"I thought as much," the hermit said, "for ye talk like Mercians, and though my eyes are so blind that I can see you but dimly, ye seem to be tall men like Mercians. Ah, a great race, lords—a great race are they and marvelous good warriors. I know them, I know them. I who lived for sixty-odd years among them, though I was of the East Anglian people."

"How long hast thou been in this wilderness?" asked the one who had spoken before.

" 'Tis now some sixteen years since I came here. Sixteen years have I been buried in this hut, in a land made desolate and void of inhabitants long ago by great Penda."

"Penda, sayest thou?"

"Aye, lord, before Penda visited this land it was a country of great beauty and prosperity. Many people lived here, and they tilled their farms and were happy. The land too was covered with splendid forests of fir and oak, wild deer abounded in the woods and fish and wild fowl filled the streams. It was a very garden of God.

"Then swept Penda over it like a destroying angel, sparing neither farm nor forest, house nor inhabitant, man nor child. He burned, ravaged, and slaughtered and the desolation that ye see on all sides, it was Penda that caused it. Many years ago it happened, and somewhat the land has recovered, but it is very little as yet, for it lacks inhabitants."

"Thy tale interests us," spoke the tall man. "Canst tell us what thou knowest of Penda and thine own tale also, old man?"

"That will I, but now go ye to your couches, for the night is far spent and ye are weary. On the morrow I will begin the tale."

They rose from their chairs, and lighting another rush at the fire bade the old man good-night and retired to the little chamber where they stretched themselves upon the two narrow couches, and soon were asleep.

Soundly they slept that night, and in the morning awoke refreshed and rested. They stirred up the dying embers on the hearth, then put fresh fuel on and cooked their morning meal. First they attended to the old man's wants and then partook themselves of a hearty breakfast. The storm was raging fiercely without. The sleet had turned to snow and was blowing in through the chinks in the hut, forming little drifts on the floor. Offa, the elder of the visitors, stuffed the chinks up with rags, and then both sat down by the old man's bed to hear his story.

Ten days was the hermit in telling it, and often was the tale interrupted by the old man's fits of weakness or emotion, particularly toward the close of the story; but having recovered from each spell he took up the thread again and went bravely on till at last the tale was ended.

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CHAPTER II

EDBERT BEGINS HIS STORY

YE ASK me to tell you the story of my life, and I will tell it you, lords, if my strength fail me not. For I am old, lords, I am old; more than fivescore Winters with their snow and storm have passed over my head, leaving it white as ye now see it. Aye, and they have been years full of stirring events, full of lies and evil plottings, full of black deeds and wicked murders—Jesu have mercy! Do ye know why I am here, here in this hut alone, I who once dwelt in the hall of kings and had princes for my friends?

It is to mourn my misspent life, and to seek by a life of penance and fasting to have my sins all purged away at last. But my tale is long, lords, and will take many nights to tell. No matter, we have the time. This storm will last ten days at least. Ask me not how I know this. Old age makes prophets of us all. My eyes are dim and my old ears hear little, but I can see things that ye can not see, and hear sounds that are beyond your hearing.

Hark how the wild wind whistles around the eaves! The storm grows wilder as the minutes pass, and wilder still it will grow, for it comes from the north, from the land of ice and snow where fierce beasts live and fiercer men. Do you know me, lords? No? Then bend your ears and I will whisper my name to you. Men call me Wuffa here, but listen—my name is Edbert, I feel you start. Yes, 'twas a great name in its day but that day is past, and Edbert's name will soon go with him to the grave.

Now let me tell my tale; but it will not be the tale of Edbert so much as of great Penda's son, Wulfhere the strong, the handsome, the good.

Before the Mercians became a nation, I was born a member of the Northfolk of East Anglia. Our people were not great in numbers—it may be they numbered tenscore hundred men beside women and children—but though they were a small people, they were strong and full of courage. Where is that people now? Dead, lords—all dead. The breath of Penda breathed upon them and they fell like leaves before the Winter's gale. Like leaves their bodies rotted in the deep valleys of the Yare, and only bones, white bones are left of the Northfolk of East Anglia—white bones and me.

My father, Eorpwald, was king of our people, and lived in Thetford town. He had three wives: of one of these I was the only son; her name was Esta. A heathen name, lords, but we were all heathen in those days. My mother had a daughter also, younger than I by full seven years. She it was who became Penda's wife; her name Cyneswithe.

When I was but eleven years of age our old nurse-woman, Fruna, took me, as she often did, over the hill to the field where our goats pastured, and as she milked I played among the goats. Soon we saw a woman coming toward us across the field. Tall and handsome she looked and queenly, but she seemed weary with much walking, and once and again her hand went to her head as if it ached. Beside her walked a lad a little older than I, but much bigger and stronger; a sturdy, healthy boy. I ceased my playing and drew close to my nurse as they came up.

"A good day to thee," said the woman.

"Good day," my nurse replied; "what can I do for thee?"

"We have journeyed far," continued the woman, "I and my son. We are both tired and hungry and would have food and rest."

"What is thy name and whence came ye?" Fruna inquired.

"My name is Burgenhild, and I am wife to Wybba, King of the Mercian people, and this is Wybba's son."

My old nurse rose from the stool. In great wrath she shook her fist in the stranger's face.

"Thou darest to come here to beg food and shelter from a people whom thy husband has robbed and plundered, and many of whose sons he has tortured and slain," she stormed. "Get thee gone, thou wife of a wolf, lest I call the men to drive thee hence!"

This she said because our peoples were on no friendly terms; there had been war between them.

The stranger showed no sign either of anger or fear.

"Nay, but we have journeyed far," she said, "and we are weary, ah, so weary and hungry. Wilt thou not give us a little milk out of thy vessel?"

"No, woman, I will not!" Fruna thundered.

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"We faint with thirst; give us some water then," pleaded the stranger, and she held out a jar that she had with her.

"No water will I give thee, not a drop; go seek it for thyself and for thy whelp, she-wolf!"

The woman turned her head, and I saw tears fall from her eyes, but when I looked upon the lad I saw his brow contracted in a dreadful frown and heard him grind his teeth. He closed his fists and stamping his foot he said to the woman—

"Mother, let us go on."

He pulled her by the arm. I was not by nature very tender-hearted as thou wilt find before this tale is done, but my heart went out to that poor woman in her trouble. I seized the vessel nearly full of milk from Fruna's hand, and ran with it to the boy. He took great gulps of it, then gave it to his mother, my nurse looking on the while and screaming curses at them. The woman in her turn drank what she wanted of it, then gave it to her son again, and he drank more—all that was left—and gave the vessel back to me. Then in the manner of a man talking to a child he spoke to me.

"I heard this she-dog with the serpent's tongue call thee Edbert, and thy people the East Angles. Hear me, thou Edbert, and ponder well my words. My name is Penda, and I am son to him who rules the Mercian nation. Misfortune has swooped down like a foul bird upon my house and snatched away my portion, and I am driven even from my own house—I and my mother—driven into the wilderness and forced to beg my bread. But hearken to me, boy, the day will come when I shall sit upon my father's seat and rule my people; aye, and not my people only, but every people in this land. Over all I shall be king.

"Then I will take sore vengeance on thy tribe—I swear it by Thunar the god I worship! I will offer up thy people a sacrifice to him, man, woman and child; none shall be spared. Thee only, Edbert, will I save. For this good deed that thou hast done I promise thee thy life, and swear that I will make thee great, and never turn against thee. As for that she-devil yonder"—and he shook his fist in his fury at the nurse—"she shall be the first to die!"

He turned to follow his mother who already was hastening away. My nurse, for a time speechless with wrath, now made for the boy as fast as her heavy body would permit her, screeching out threats of vengeance. He turned to face her as she reached him. His little fist shot out and caught her full on the stomach, and the blow made her stagger and gasp for breath. Again he hit her in the same place, and then full in the face. As she reeled backward her foot caught in a stone and down she went.

She had a heavy body, as I said, and as she fell her whole weight jammed her head against a rock, and she lay there stunned and bleeding. The lad Penda stood over her for a moment with a look of scornful triumph in his face, then spurned her with his foot and spat upon her, and turned to hasten after his mother. I watched them as they passed out of sight around the hill, and my small heart was full of awe as I thought of his strange swelling words, and wondered if his prophecy would be fulfilled.

And has it not come true, lords? Think of the kings that he has taken and slain: Edwin, Oswald, Sigebert, Ecgric, Anna, and more beside. Think of the lands that he added to his own: Deira, Bernicia, North Gwyre and South Gwyre, Lindesey, East Anglia, the country of the Magesetas, and the land of the Hecanas, and many more. Think of these things and then say if ye can that Penda was no prophet. But I am wandering from my tale.

I found my nurse lying stunned upon the ground. I raise her bruised and bleeding head up just as she recovered from her swoon. For a long time she sat there gazing downward, the blood from her wound falling on her knees. At last she spoke.

"Come, boy, let us go home. A fearful dream has come to me, Edbert. I saw a tree grow up beside some other trees. 'Twas small at first but it grew and grew till it seemed to reach the clouds. I saw it fall upon one tree and crush it, then rise and fall upon another and crush it also; and so it went on crushing all about it. One tree I saw it grind even to small powder. Then as I looked I saw the head of Penda look out from the great tree's branches. Its trunk became his body and its limbs his arms and legs. The other trees that lay upon the earth were the nations around about, and, wo is me—the one he crushed to powder was the tree of my own people! Fearful things will come to pass, Edbert; this Penda will work us wo.

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"But hearken! I saw thee in my dream smite Penda, and thy spear stuck out behind his throat, and he fell dead. Never before have I dreamed a dream like this. These things will surely come to pass, and when they do, Edbert, then play thy part, be not afraid, for if thou failest in that day may all the curses of the holy gods light on thee! Come, let us go home."

She led me home, both of us pondering these things in our hearts, and though she spoke but little of her dream thereafter, for many days she kept reminding me that I must not fail when the hour came. In two weeks she died as Penda said she would, of the wound that he had given her, the first among my people of his victims.

CHAPTER III

HOW EDBERT AND CYNESWITHE, HIS SISTER, FLED FROM THETFORD

NOT long after this my mother also died, and little Cyneswithe and myself were left alone without a friend, for our father took another wife and paid but little heed to us. Moreover, his other children by his other wives treated us badly, for they were jealous of us. So as the years went by I grew to manhood and Cyneswithe to womanhood, she fairer than any in my father's house and I the strongest and the bravest.

Ah—we did love each other, lords, we had no others to love. Wherever I went there Cyneswithe went also, and so she learned to hunt just like a man; aye, and to cast the spear and wield the sword. I freely taught her all I knew till she had all the skill that I had, albeit not the strength.

One day my father's eldest son, Tytla by name, who had oftentimes taunted me, and upon whom at last I had turned and administered a fine beating, so that he never taunted me again—only he was at all times sullen and quiet in my presence—one day, I say, when I was in the hills, this man said evil things of me before my sister. She stood it long, then picking up a sword she bade him make good his words upon her with his weapon.

He only laughed and made fun of her, he and his brothers. She called him liar, craven, sneak; they only laughed the more. In her anger she raised her sword and smote him on the helm. He reeled from the blow, for it was no gentle one, then rushed at her with his own sword raised to strike.

"I'll have thy life for this!" he hissed.

"So be it," she replied; "let us fight to the death."

He was in a fury and had no thought to find skill at sword-play in a woman, and so was reckless. She parried his blows, heavy though they were, then using a trick that I had taught her, she twisted his weapon from his hand, and as he reached to grasp it flying from him she tripped him up and set her sword's point at his throat as he lay full-length on the ground.

He looked up at her, and seeing the fury in her eye he thought his hour had come. Then the craven in him showed itself, and he fairly cried for mercy. She let the point down closer till it began to enter his skin, while he screeched aloud for fear. Then she turned away from him and went back to the house.

When I returned that night she told me of the trouble. I was for killing him right there and then, but she prevailed on me to leave things as they were.

"He has suffered great shame already, being beaten by a woman," she said. "Do not demean thy sword by lifting it against a coward."

I would have taken my whip and thrashed him as we thrash a thrall, but Cyneswithe said:

"Let be; remember he is the eldest son, the chief that is to be of his people. If thou doest this thou wilt not live till morning."

So I let things be and did not raise my hand against him, but I took every chance to taunt him in my turn, so that he avoided my presence and learned to hate me with a bitter hatred. Taunt as I would, he feared to fight me; he only uttered surly threats, and I knew he was plotting dark deeds against me and my sister.

And so the days went by until my father fell very ill and all knew that his end was near. Already Tytla, my brother, had begun to exercise some of the authority of a chief. I could see a kind of triumph in his eyes when I met him, as if he felt now his hour was near and he would soon be able to visit vengeance on me, his hated brother. I paid little heed to him myself, but Cyneswithe watched him closely, and feared much for us both.

One day she brought my hunting-suit to me and bade me put it on.

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"Come, put these on, Edbert, I would hunt with thee today," she said.

I put them on. She then brought me my favorite spear and sword, buckling the one to my belt and laying the other against the chair.

"Men do not hunt with swords," I said. "Why not leave this at home?" And I began to unbuckle it again.

She reached out and stopped me.

"Nay, nay; leave it on thee. I'll tell thee why when we get to the hills."

I thought it rather strange but said no more till I saw her strap a small bag to her waist.

"What hast thou in that bag?" I asked.

"Only a few small cakes perhaps," she answered. "It may be we shall be hungry on the way."

I felt that she had something in her mind, and that it was not a hunt that she was thinking of, but said no more.

She whistled to our wolf-hound Hryp, and we all three started. All that morning and afternoon we journeyed straight north and west. More than one fine stag dashed past us, and I was for following them, as was the dog; but no, Cyneswithe forbade it and always called the dog back.

"But why, sister, dost thou stop us? Did we not come here to hunt?" I asked. "That last was a fine stag, and I am hungry."

"All in good time, brother; but see, there is another," she answered.

Right ahead of us a deer burst from the thicket and went off at a great pace, not across our path as the others did, but right on in the direction we were traveling.

"Come, brother, let us after him," she cried, and off we all went in hot pursuit. We were both fleet of foot and soon overtook the deer, hampered as he was in his flight by the many trees and bushes. Cyneswithe was the first to reach him, and herself dispatched him with her spear.

It was now evening. The sun had set and the shadows of the coming night began to creep through the forest. We had had nothing to eat but a cake or two since morning, and were very hungry. We made a fire between two stones, and cutting a roast from the deer we had killed we cooked and ate it. When we had finished our meal and fed our good dog also, my curiosity at last got the better of me.

"Sister," I said, "why didst thou bring me hither, and why are we resting in this place so many miles from Thetford at this late hour when we ought to be within our father's walls?"

"Edbert," she began, and her look was very solemn and her voice low, almost a whisper, "listen to me, Edbert. Last night I overheard Richbert the thane say to Tytla thy brother, 'The powder that I put in thy father's cup works; he can not live another day.' I saw joy in thy brother's face when he heard this, and I saw him hasten home to his quarters. It was dark, and unseen by him I followed. Noiselessly I climbed upon his roof and lay in a position from which by bending over I could see into his window. His two brethren Sibba and Hunferth were there. I placed my ear close to a crack in the roof and listened to their talk.

" 'What is the news, brother?' I heard Hunferth ask, and I heard Tytla's voice answer—

" 'He dies tomorrow.'

" 'What, as soon as that?' said Sibba. 'How knowest thou?'

" 'Richbert the thane it was who told me,' Tytla answered.

" 'It is time then, brother, that thou begin to look to thine own. Thou knowest that we thy brethren are for thee because thou art the eldest of our father's sons, and because thou art our brother, but the people love thee not, and I am told they want that dog Edbert to be king.' This I heard Hunferth say, and Tytla answered with an oath:

" 'Tomorrow Edbert must go to join our father; the dog must die tomorrow. I dare not kill him till our father dies, but by Woden and all the gods I swear that Edbert will be with Tiw by tomorrow night!'

"As he said this I heard Tytla call down curses on thy head. I leaned out too far to see them better in the room, and losing my balance I fell right past the window to the ground. Well for me there was no door on that side of the house. Else had they been upon me in a moment. For a minute I lay partly stunned by the fall, then gathering my wits together I vanished into the night, and the darkness covered my flight. Looking back as I fled I saw them standing with a torch where I fell, looking into every corner to discover me. I went back to our house, my brother, and made this plan for our escape."

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"Cyneswithe, thou didst well," I said. "Thou hast saved my life, my sister, and also perchance thine own. But we are not safe yet. Come, if thou art rested let us journey on while there is yet light enough to see by. Thou knowest it is against our laws for any to leave our land without permission from the king. Our brother will soon miss us, and guessing that we know his guilty secret will send men to overtake us. Come, let us go."

WE AROSE, and after destroying as well as we could the traces of our fire and meal, we started. Till long after midnight we journeyed on, a bright moon giving us light, till, the moon in its turn going down, in the darkness we lit a fire, and lying down beside it were soon asleep, for we were tired.

We could not have been long asleep when Hryp's low growling awoke us. Looking around us we could see on every side dark shadows flitting about, and fiery eyes gazing at us through the darkness; while every now and then a low snarl that made our flesh creep told us that we were surrounded by wolves. My sister drew close to me as I put fresh fagots on the flame and stirred the fire up to a bright blaze. The wolves drew farther off.

There was no more sleep for us that night, and so we sat and talked of what we were to do when morning came. I tried to talk of other things than wolves to quiet Cyneswithe's fears, but always she would ask—

"What of the wolves, what of the wolves?"

Would they scatter at the dawn and leave us? I asked myself. Little fear had I ever had of wolves, for I knew what cowards they were, but even cowards gain courage when there are numbers with them, and I could see that the wolves were many about us. But I said nothing of my fears to Cyneswithe. As lightly as I could I only laughed and said:

"Why, sister, thou shouldst never fear a wolf. 'Tis like they will disperse at dawn, for their deeds are dark and darkness hates the light. But even if they do not we will fight them, sister, thou and I and Hryp."

Her fears were not quite silenced, though she had great faith in me, her brother.

And so the hours went by till the light began to creep in quietly among the trees, and still those shadowy figures moved about us. Soon it was broad daylight, and now we could see our enemies licking their chops and hear them snarling like demons. Our fire was almost at its end, and we had no more fagots with which to replenish it. I knew that when it died then they would be upon us, and so I thought of a plan whereby I could at least decrease their numbers before the great fight came.

The leader of the pack, a huge gray fellow, sat upon his haunches ten paces nearer us than the rest. It was my plan to rush upon the nearest with my spear, then hurry back to our protecting fire before the others could be upon me. I told Cyneswithe my plan and bade her stir the fire up as I rushed back; then taking a piece of venison in my hand I hurled it far out among the beasts. At once there was a scramble for the meat. I saw the leader turn his head to watch the fight among his followers for the venison; then seizing my spear I rushed upon him.

He turned in time to leap at me, but my javelin pierced his heart, and wrenching it free I fled back to the fire. Three of the boldest of them ventured up to the dead body of their leader. Smelling the blood upon him two of them seized him with their jaws and dragged him backward to the pack. A wild scene that was as they surged in upon the body, fighting and snarling, and soon there was little left of it but bones. While they were thus engaged I ventured out upon the new leader as he watched the scene.

Before he saw me coming my spear was in his throat. Two of them, seeing me, left the pack and made at me. I thrust my spear down the first one's throat and slew the second with my sword. Two more came on and I slew them also; then seeing others preparing to rush at me I ran back to the fire.

Six wolves were now accounted for out of a pack of twenty-five at least. And now they threw themselves upon the dead bodies of their fellows. A horrible and disgusting sight it was to see them tear their own brothers to pieces, the blood, still warm, pouring from their ugly jaws. When they had finished I saw them lick their lips and yawn and stretch. It meant that they had had enough and would trouble us no more, for wolves fight not but when they are hungry.

We waited till they gradually scattered;

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then gathering a few sticks we revived our dying fire, roasted and ate a piece of venison we had left, quenched our thirst at a spring near by and resumed our journey.

CHAPTER IV

HOW EDBERT MET PENDA FOR THE SECOND TIME

FOR three days we traveled on, making our way steadily toward the northwest. The wolves troubled us no more, but we met with several bears and a wild boar. These all avoided us, and we did not try to do them any mischief. On the fourth day about noon as we rested behind a little bush we heard men's voices and looking out saw a little band of men of our own tribe. They were our brother's search-party whom he had sent after us. Toward the northeast they were journeying, and when they were out of sight we continued toward the northwest.

For two days more we traveled, meeting several people as we went, till we saw we were approaching a village. It was plain that all was not well there, and soon we found what was the matter. On all sides huts had been burned down and the bodies of men, women and children lay in the ruins or in the street.

Here was a fair-haired mother, her babe pinned to her breast with a huge javelin; there was a man standing against a tree, held upright by a long knife stuck through his throat and buried deep in the wood; inside a half-burned house we found three infants strung on a spear like beads on a thread; before the ruins of what had been a fair-sized stone house—perhaps the home of the head man of that village—was a long pole planted in the ground, and stuck upon the top of it the head and arms of a man.

On every side were bodies of people of every age, some with arrows sticking from them, others with cruel sword-wounds, some terribly hacked and mutilated as if by axes and knives, all showing signs of awful violence. I sickened at the sight and Cyneswithe clung to me in terror. A Christian cross of wood stood in the center of a small square fronting the head man's house, and a ghastly form, stripped naked and nailed through hands and feet, hung from it, and leered upon us with an awful grin.

A little church was burned to the ground; I counted the charred remains of full thirty bodies in the ruins, and the body of the priest lay tied upon the altar. There must have been two hundred dead in that ill-fated village. Some inhuman monster had paid it a visit and with his soldiers wreaked an awful vengeance on its people.

"Is there a chief in all the land could do a deed like this?" I asked Cyneswithe.

"Edbert, it is terrible—it is terrible," she sobbed; "take me away from this—take me away."

As she spoke I thought I saw a body near us move. I went to it and stooped down to see if there was still life there. It was the body of a fair young girl. Her face and clothing were smeared with blood and dust, but I could see that she was beautiful. A great wound gaped in her naked breast, and her kirtle was half-torn off her. I placed my hand over her heart and felt it faintly beating.

We raised her head and let it rest upon Cyneswithe's knee. In a faint voice she asked for water. I went to the stream near by and drew some and put it to her lips. She opened her eyes and thanked me. We laved her face and washed the blood away from her neck and breast, and bathed her wound. When we had done this we carried her gently to a shaded place and laid her on the rich soft grass. When she seemed well enough to talk we asked her who had wrought this awful havoc.

"Penda," she answered, "Penda the Mercian. He came with a band of his fierce men, and because we would not set up Woden in our village and worship him, this is the way he served us."

"But hadst thou no men in thy town to fight these Mercians?" I asked her. "See, there are many bodies of women and children and aged men, but there are few warriors of thy people."

"The women and children he slew," she answered, "but most of the men he overpowered and carried away. He wants them for his army."

Suddenly she raised herself and sat up.

"Ah! God in heaven! See, there is my poor brother!" she cried, pointing to a body that lay near, then hid her face behind her hands and sobbed aloud.

It was the body of a young man, a mere youth, but he was tall and strong and handsome. Two Mercians lay dead before

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him; another he still clutched in a death-grip by the throat, while that other's dagger was sticking in his side. He died nobly defending his fair sister's life. All this had happened but the day before. The poor maid died that very evening commending her poor soul to Christ. We scattered leaves upon her and let her lie—what more could we do?—and then went on.

That night we lay in a little grove and went to sleep there, but with the first light of morning we were up. We caught a small hare and cooked it at the fire we made, and glad enough we were for even that poor fare. When we had finished eating we washed in the stream, then climbed a hill to see just where we were, and how we were to travel.

Cyneswithe was the first to reach the top. I heard her give a little scream, then leap down from the rock on which she had been standing; and looking down into the valley on the other side I saw what she had seen: seven armed men with swords and spears, men of my own people, the very band that was pursuing us. They saw us too and raised a great shout as they ran toward us. We bounded off with all our speed, fear giving wings to our feet.

Along the mountain crest we sped, and into the valley beyond where lay the river. It was wide and deep but we threw away all but our swords and plunged into the water, our dog Hryp swimming on before us. When still within spear's-throw from the bank we left, our pursuers reached the river. A javelin clave the water by my side and another fell close behind me, but still we swam on with all our strength. We heard them shouting at us from the shore—

"Ha, we will catch you yet, or if we do not the rapids will!"

We heard the roaring of the rapids as the current rushed toward a deep fall in the river two hundred yards below. We felt the current seize us and sweep us toward our death. I bade Cyneswithe seize Hryp by the tail, then urged him on. About the middle of the stream a long rock stretched before us. With a last effort of my failing strength I made toward it; then grasping its lower end I seized Cyneswithe by the arm and dragged both her and Hryp upon it. The rock, lying low in the water, stretched perhaps a hundred yards upstream.

We rested for a moment, then ran up to the farther end and plunged once more into the flood, to make if we could the farther shore. We made it, but 'twas only just in time; another minute and we should have been helpless in the rapids' grasp, and whirled down to our doom. We landed, I say, faint from the weariness of that terrible struggle; then looking toward the opposite bank we saw the soldiers running up the stream seeking a ford, and we knew that we must be moving.

I placed my arm about Cyneswithe's waist and half-dragged, half-carried her forward. For three more hours we traveled on, our pace now but a slow walk, till we struck a road that led to the brow of the hill, and from the hill we could see, a half-hour's journey farther on, a small walled town.

"Courage, my sister, courage," I said. "There lies Penda's town before us. We shall soon reach it and then we shall be safe."

But she shook her head as she staggered on, and answered:

"Nay, brother, we are like sheep fleeing from the wolf into the lion's jaws. Who is Penda that he should spare us? But hark! I hear the wolves behind us."

I looked back and saw not far away six of our pursuers. They had found a ford and crossed, all save one who it seems was drowned while crossing. Fear gave us strength afresh, and now we ran. Soon we would be at Penda's gate if only our strength held out, but our pursuers were close upon us.

"Run quickly, my sweet sister," I cried, "make for the gate with all thy speed."

THEN speaking to the dog who galloped at our side we stopped, we two—while Cyneswithe stumbled on—to await our pursuers. They ran, not two and two, but one behind the other, the first ten paces before the second, and the other four a full spear's-throw behind the leader. I had no spear; I had only my sword. And now the first man was but twenty paces from me. I seized a heavy stone and hurled it at him just as his javelin left his hand. His weapon missed its mark, but mine took him full in the face. It dazed him just long enough to permit me to pass my sword clean through him.

Down came the next man at me, but sore

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hampered by Hryp's attack he could not use his weapons against me to advantage, and so I slew him. Hryp turned his attention to the next. I saw the man stab at him with his spear, and it sank deep in the old dog's flank. With a fierce growl he sprang at the soldier's throat, and the two went rolling to the ground. I picked up the javelin of the last man I had slain and hurled it at the next oncoming enemy, then turned and fled.

Fifty paces from the gate of the town I overtook Cyneswithe. Before I could reach her though she slipped and fell and lay there in a faint, while I—I was too weary even to stoop to raise her up—I could only stand there looking down upon her. Our two surviving enemies, who had waited a few moments by their dead comrades, now came on foaming with rage, their spears raised in their hands. Now we were as good as dead, yet somehow I cared not; I had no thought just then for my poor life. I was too weary to raise even a hand to ward off certain death; only half in a dream I stood and gazed upon my sister.

Just then I heard a clanging at the gate. It swung open, and out marched a company of Penda's soldiers, dragging with them two prisoners. Behind them stalked a huge man, a very giant; he must have been seven feet in height. His two thanes who walked by him, though six feet tall, looked like small men beside him. A short beard fiery-red hung from his face, his eyes were dark, unlike his face and beard and hair, his chest was like a bull's and his great bare arms were a mass of solid muscle.

The hugest, strongest, fiercest-looking man he was that ever I laid eyes on. He did not appear though to be much older than myself, and if that fierce cruel look were off his face one might have called him handsome. He wore a shirt of ring mail under his tunic, and from his belt there hung a mighty ax. In his right hand he carried a great spear full twice as heavy as any I ever saw, and when he spoke his voice was like a bear's.

The soldiers looked our way, and three of them ran toward us just as the two men of our people reached us.

"Who are ye that dare raise your spears here?" one of them demanded.

The two men paused and lowered their upraised weapons.

"We are two men of the East Angles," they answered, "and Eorpwald is our king. His son, Tytla, hath sent us seven men after these two—this man and this woman—for they are evil-doers whose lives are forfeited. See, they have slain us all save us two. We pray thee let us smite them and carry out the orders of our king."

"Not Eorpwald reigns here, but Penda the Strong, he whose treading shakes the earth. Ask him if ye may slay these two, and ask him too that he spare yourselves," the same man answered.

He was one of those two captains whom I had seen at Penda's side.

The great man heard the words and stalked up to the spot on which we stood. He looked down from his great height on us, then frowned and turning to our late pursuers asked them what they meant by slaying on his ground.

The captain, Eafa by name, replied for them.

"They say, great King, that these are murderers, and that they are here to kill them."

"It is good that murderers should die; therefore let them slay them," answered the king.

"Our thanks to thee, O King," said the two men, and once again they raised their spears.

I saw them flash in the sunlight, the one above my head and the other over my sister's breast.

"Hold!" roared the king. "I have some more to say. Eafa, when these have slain the murderers, smite off their arms, seeing that they dared to raise spear before Penda's gate. Now, children of Eorpwald, kill!"

The two East Angles dropped their spears upon the ground and looked in great fear at the king.

"What? Do you fear to slay a helpless man and a senseless woman?" roared Penda again.

"Come, Eafa," he ordered, "slay me these two murderers, and hang these men on yonder oak."

I heard all this as in a dream, but now I must speak up.

"Oh, Penda, King, look on me, I am Edbert!" I cried.

I knew it was not enough to say, but my breath left me and I ceased.

The soldiers laughed, while on King Penda's face was a cruel mocking leer.

"So thou art the great Edbert," he

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mocked, "Edbert the mighty, the magnificent, well known for thy prowess and great deeds over all this land of England. All hail, great warrior, hail!" And he bowed his great height before me, while a shout of laughter went up from his soldiers' throats.

"Nay but, King, I am Edbert son of Eorpwald of the tribe of the East Angles. I gave thee milk once on a time when thou wert athirst and weary—thou and thy mother. Thou didst swear that day that thou wouldst protect me, and never do me harm, yea, and make me great under thy shadow. I, Edbert, swear to thee that this is true. 'Tis not for kings to break their oaths. Save me now and my sister."

Penda looked long and fixedly at me.

"My memory tells me thou speakest truth, Edbert," he said at last. "Yes, yes, methinks I do remember that day long years ago when thou gavest me the milk the woman of thy tribe refused me. Well for thee, Edbert, I remember this. Come, thou art safe. I'll take thee to my house to be my thrall, and thou mayest wash my feet. It is an honor, man, quite undeserved by any of thy house. What like is thy sister?" he asked as he turned her still senseless body over with his foot. "Ah, she is fair! Eafa, bear her to my house; wash her and give her food; it may be I will take her to wife."

Then turning to his soldiers he thundered:

"Bring me yonder two cowards who fled from the lad the other day in Sledda's village!"

The two prisoners I had seen being dragged along through the gate were now led forward, and swords were put in their hands at Penda's order.

"Would ye have your lives?" he asked of my two people. "Then slay me these rabbits."

With a rush they charged upon the Mercians, and a fierce fight followed. My people were good fighters; whatever their faults there was no coward blood in them. They slew their adversaries, then folding their arms they waited Penda's orders.

"Go!" he said, and waved his hand. "Go tell your king the ravens croak over his dwelling, and the lion will soon be at his gate. Begone!"

They waited to hear no more, but bowed before him, then sped off at a deer's flight down the road till they were lost to view.

CHAPTER V

PENDA THE TERRIBLE

AND so it came to pass that I and my sister came to Penda's town. It was not his chief town but a small one where he tarried till he could burn and harry certain tribes around about. Crowland the town was named; it has grown large since then.

Already, though Penda was but six and twenty, he had begun to grow big, big in lands and people as he had said he would. But I will tell you more of this hereafter.

A fortnight later Cyneswithe, rested and recovered from an illness that had seized her, Penda took to wife. Me he at first made to wait upon him like a thrall—me, the son of a king—and many times I could have driven a dagger through his ribs if I had had one, so cruel was his abuse; but none carried arms inside the royal house—none save himself. He grew to trust me though as time went by, and I became one of his councilors. He made me priest too, and one of his thanes.

Now I would tell you, lords, that Penda was a pagan of the pagans. He loved the old religion of our fathers, and with all his soul he hated the new—that of the Christ. It turned a warrior into a woman, he said; it was no religion for a man. Did it not call upon its votaries to give up war and set aside the spear? Woman virtues such as meekness, gentleness, forgiveness, mercy, peace, humility, patience, it extolled, and tried to put down all the manly qualities, strength, pride, ambition, vengeance, warlike prowess.

Away with it, away with it! He would yet live to see Woden with his spear and Thunar with his hammer once more sitting enthroned and reigning without rival over all England; aye, and he himself would be their champion and set them up. So this became his great ambition—to restore the old gods and to rule under them. He was not all for them as you will see; he was also for himself, for he loved power.

Let me say this, lords: Penda did not always despise the Christians. He learned when he grew older to respect those of them that were true to their faith; for he often made them suffer and they bore it with true manliness; and above all things Penda loved courage. Yea, when he grew old he saw the difference between the courage of the Christian and that of his own people,

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and he could see the former was the truer kind. I think, lords, that he might have joined our holy faith, but could not brook a God that died as Christ died, on a tree. No, the old gods of war and thunder were more to his liking.

Now all the time I was his councilor and priest I ministered to his ambition for my own ends, for I was wise and cunning, wiser and cunninger than any man in Penda's kingdom—yea, even than the king himself. I had to be, lords, else I had never lived. Even the god's priests he put to death when they displeased him; he feared neither god nor man.

One day when we went up against Cynegils, King of the Gwissei, as our two armies stood the one facing the other waiting the order to begin the battle, King Penda saw a company of their priests offering sacrifices to the gods for victory.

"See ye yon priests?" he shouted to his captains. "They bear no weapons, but they fight against us when they entreat the gods for victory; smite them with the rest, and slay them."

Penda's chief priest, Cnebba, was there, not as a priest now, but as a warrior with spear in hand and ax at belt, for Penda would have no priests that could not also fight. This priest came forward and said:

"My Lord King, it were a great sin against the gods to slay their priests unarmed and at their worship."

"No matter," Penda answered, "smite them—kill them!"

"But they are priests of Woden, King, and priests of Thunar; do not this sin lest the gods give victory to our enemies," urged Cnebba.

While he spoke Penda's face became dark like a thunder-cloud. He seized his ax and with a bound he was upon the priest. The great ax swept above his head as he raised his arm to protect himself from the blow. Through arm and helm and skull it clove its way, and Cnebba fell cleft to the jaw. It was an awful stroke. The soldiers and the priests looked on with awe and fear. They dreaded the vengeance of the gods for this deed against their priest, but even more they feared the wrath of the king.

Penda looked at the dead, then turned and looked into the faces of the men. He saw fear there and disapproval of his act, and he knew it might affect the issue of the battle.

"My children," he cried, "let not this deed dismay you. This was a traitor in that he pleaded for the lives of his king's enemies. What—shall they smite at will the priests of Penda fighting with their spears and shall we not smite their priests fighting with their prayers? Where lies the difference, men, tell me that? Has Woden a better servant in yon king who serves a Christian master than in Penda whose life is given up to the work of restoring him and his worship through the length of this land? There are true priests and there are false, say I, and he is true to Woden who punishes Woden's priests when they are traitors; and they are false to Woden when they are false to Woden's champion."

I mention this case, lords, merely to show how little Penda feared even the gods he worshiped. Yes, the king could brook no opposition. I, Edbert, studied all his moods—they were an easy study—and I acted in accordance with them. He was ambitious—I urged on his ambition. Would he go up against Cynegils of Wessex?

"Yea, King, go up and prosper," I advised.

"But he has far more men than I, and all my councilors say, 'Go not.'"

"Go up!" said I. "Thou art the champion of the holy gods, and they go with thee."

He went and prospered. Would he go out and war against the Magesetas?

"Aye, go and win the victory," I said.

"But this is madness," urged Penda's lords, "we should bring Malgo and Cuneglasse with all the hosts of Powis-land and Gwyned on us."

"No matter," I said, "Penda will beat them all; the gods are with him."

The lords began altogether to protest against such mad council. Penda roared at them to be silent, then sat and gazed into my face. What he saw there I know not.

"Edbert, Edbert, methinks thou art a prophet," he said. "I know thou art a servant of the gods. I feel it in my bones, Edbert, that thou art right. Yea, by the gods, were they three times as strong I will go up—and prosper!"

He went and prospered.

AND so it chanced not once nor twice but many times, and I became a prophet in his eyes, and won much favor. I know not how it came but I was always right as it turned out. I can't say

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that the gods advised me; I think 'twas only common-sense that did it. I knew the strength of Penda and his host; I knew the weakness also of his foes. Numbers count for little after all, but unitedness and discipline, determination and courage and skilful generalship do count for much. We had not numbers but we had all the rest.

It took no seer to foretell victory against a horde ten times our number where there was little discipline, poor leadership, discord and lack of spirit for the fight. So we went sweeping on from victory to victory, winning every battle, all save one if we count not Penda's last fight wherein he died. Strange too it seemed to all that I proved right again in the matter of his defeats, for they all said—

"Go up, go up, great King, the gods will deliver them into thy hand!"

But I said—

"Nay, go not, King."

And yet he went, and failed.

So I became a prophet and a priest in Penda's house, and his first councilor. In matters of religion he looked more to me than to all the rest together. In matters of state my voice had the first say. And so the others learned through envy to hate me, all save two—Immin and Eafa. Immin was very tall and sinewy, Eafa shorter but very broad of chest. Strong men they were both of them, the mightiest warriors in Penda's army. They were content to let me lead in the councils, so they led in the battle. Yea, they learned to love me, for was not my council always, "Go up, King, go up and fight," and they loved battle.

Ah, lords, those days are long since passed away, and I fight now not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers of darkness that would tread down my soul; but in my carnal moods I fight those battles o'er again; I stand with sword in hand at Penda's side, and while he deals out death to others, with sword and shield I cast off death from him.

I want to tell you now of that first fight I stood in with great Penda, I mean the first great battle that we fought. Cynegils and his son, Cwichelm, Kings of the West Saxons, being wroth that Penda drew so near their borders, sent orders to him to withdraw within his own else they would drive him there. Penda abused the Saxons' heralds, for they came with high heads and great words as though they scorned the Mercian. He had them whipped for their offensive manners, and sent them back to Wessex in their shirts.

The war began, and soon two armies faced each other. On Cynegils' side were twenty thousand men, on Penda's fourteen thousand. The enemy were massed upon a hill. Across a stream from them we occupied an elevated plain. During most of the night went on the preparation for the conflict; all night the camp-fires glowed, and afar off could be heard the howling of wolves waiting for the morrow's feast. Far into the night the rough songs of the soldiers echoed down the valley, then slowly died away as the men laid them down to sleep on the soft ground, till there was no sound in either camp but the sharp challenge of the sentries as they paced to and fro before the lines.

Then with the dawn the whole host woke and had their meal. Say, lords, it was a glorious sight to see those regiments of Penda drawn up in battle-order, tall men and stalwart boys, gray-beards and lads with down upon their chins, but all strong and fit for the fight; there were no weaklings in great Penda's army. The king spread out his host in a long array, himself commanding the center, Immin the right, Eafa the left. His purpose was to swing his wing around when the time came so as to take his enemy, who was drawn up in a solid square, in flank and rear, then with his center drive a wedge clean through his foe.

Soon Penda was seen stalking before the ranks. Ah, what a shout went up as they saw his giant form glistening in bright armor. He leaped upon his charger that champed and snorted for the fray; then the herald striding forward—the banner of Mercia in his hand—started the war song.

> Penda the Terrible,
> Penda the Glorious.
> Woden, the war-god's son,
> Pride of old Mercia.
> Worthy to follow, he,
> Into the battle;
> Red shall our spear-points be
> With blood of the foe.

The regiments took up the song; on every side they took it up with swords and spears and battle-axes raised high in the air. Say, if there was a coward in all

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that host he was a brave man now. That song would make a weak man strong. 'Twould make a craven fight a giant. It stirs my old blood even yet and makes me drunk with battle lust. Alack, what do I say? Mary have mercy on me—I am a wretched sinner! 'Tis hard, lords, hard for an old warrior to forget these things.

Penda lifted his war-ax and the song ceased.

"My children," he began, and his voice like a great bull's was heard by all the host, "my children, yonder stands the army of the Gwissei. Will you fight them—will you fight them?"

"Yea, King, we will fight them!" came the answering roar.

"But they are many and ye are few; are ye afraid of them, ye children of Penda?"

"Nay! Nay!" like thunder came back the answer. "Let us at them, King, let us at them!"

"Forward the regiment of the Hecanas!"

With their white shields on arm and their long spears in hand the Hecanas leaped from the ranks.

"There lie the Gwissei," said Penda, pointing with his ax, "go, and die!"

THEY answered not, but with set faces of men going to their death they went. Running slowly at first they crossed the stream, then began to ascend the hill on which stood the enemy. Out from the ranks of that solid square spring a regiment of the Gwissei. With a great shout the two come together. We can hear the ring of their shields as swords and spears clash against them.

The Hecanas stagger with the shock—they bear back. The cowards, will they fly? Nay, nay, 'tis but the first crash of the battle. On they go—on, on! The Gwissei yield—they fly back to their host; the Hecanas follow. Only half of them are left now. The regiment of the enemy melts into the solid mass behind them. We see the Hecanas pause to draw their breath. Will they return when Penda bade them die? We see them move again—forward, not back.

Again the clash of swords and shields as they throw themselves against that solid wall of death before them. And now they fall like Autumn leaves before the blast. A hundred only stand—now fifty—now a score. They turn and fly—and Penda bade them die. And now they reach our lines.

"Cowards!" the soldiers hiss, as with hanging heads they pass back to our rear.

Penda speaks to the two thanes at his side. They run to the captains of the legions. Out from the ranks spring three full regiments. Across the stream they pour, and up the hill. Far off to the right I see great Immin lead three regiments more, and on the left Eafa too with three. Not up the hill but around its flanks these go. The Gwissei see them not for they are hidden by the trees; besides the enemy have not time to look to either side, they only look right ahead at the three that are upon them.

And now they meet the foe. With spear and sword and battle-ax they fight. Deep into the heart of the enemy the Mercians hew their way. They fall by hundreds but still on they go, and for every man that falls two foemen bite the dust. The great square closes in on them—it eats them up. Of those three thousand men not one is left alive.

The Wessex square stands solid as a rock—and things look black for Penda.

Four Mercian regiments are left on the plain with the king. I see him shade his eyes and look now west, now east. He sees the glint of spears among the trees on either side of the hill. The time has come.

"Charge, men of Mercia, charge!"

His voice rings out like a clarion-call. There is a rustle and a clatter of weapons, then the pounding of many feet as the whole host thunders toward the stream. Now we are across and rushing at a headlong pace straight up the hill. Full forty paces in the lead is Penda on his great gray steed. A dozen javelins fly at him, but he meets them with his shield and turns them off. And now his horse with a great leap carries him over the very heads of the front rank of the enemy.

The steed is down, pierced with a dozen spears, but Penda is on his feet. His great ax sweeps a way before him. Like a reaper in the corn he mows men down at every step. Wow! But that was a man—a pagan, but a man—a cruel, bloody tyrant, but a man—a blasphemer and a devil, but a man. A man, I say, Christian though I now be, and though my soul were damned for it still would I say "a man." It was not

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hard to follow where Penda led, because he cut a way before us. Soon we were with him. Deeper and deeper we hewed a path till we were through, and the great square was divided.

We heard the thunder of battle on the flanks of the enemy as Immin and Eafa fell upon them. We mowed them down like grass. They were brave men and but few of them fled, and all the rest lay dead at last upon that hill. At sunrise twenty thousand men had looked down on our host and the joy of battle flashed from every eye; now they lay stark and stiff. I looked on Penda as he leaned upon his ax and panted like a war-horse.

"Edbert, surely thou art a prophet," he said, "but thou camest very near being a false one."

"True, King," said I, "another victory such as this and thou art undone."

We mustered all our men that survived; we had barely three thousand. Fourteen thousand saw the sun rise that day; eleven thousand would never see the sun rise again.

You ask me of the Hecanas who fled from the field. When we returned to our camp Penda ordered them forward.

"Slay them!" he roared. "Slay me these cravens! I bade them go and die, but they liked not the battle and returned. Penda will have no cowards in his camp. Slay them I say!"

Now though they fled the battle yet they died like brave men. Not one asked his life. The soldiers fell upon them and they died. This was Penda's way of teaching his men that whate'er befell them in the battle they must fight and fly not; and never again did a beaten regiment return to Penda's camp.

This was but one fight, lords, one of the many that I fought in. Fresh regiments were raised from every nation that we conquered till we had an army again, and then we marched on to subdue another people. And so we went from place to place, till soon there were no small kings left and but few great ones, and many of these too Penda crushed.

Now Mercia had grown big, and Penda was big also—bigger than any king in England. But even yet he was not big enough, nor Mercia either.

"Mercia," he said, "must be as big as England."

CHAPTER VI

WULFHERE IS BORN

PENDA had two sons. It was enough, he said, and he would have no more. But he had many wives and all of them wished for children. He would not have it.

"Edbert, I keep in mind the many kings slain by their own false sons," he said to me. "Ambition is a demon that goads man on to power. Power it will have, and neither gods nor men can hinder it. If men try to prevent it they die. Didst thou not say thy eldest brother was ambitious and put a powder in his sick father's cup? And has it not been so a score of times here in England?

"I was ambitious, Edbert, and I slew my sire because of the wrong he did me, and—well, because I wished his throne. Like sire like son, say I. As the tree is so is the fruit. My sons will be like me, and when the time comes they will want my kingdom. What can I do against them if I have a score or more? Two are enough to watch."

And so though Penda's wives bore many sons he slew them all. This was the rule in his house and all knew it.

I have not told you, lords, that at the time Penda spoke these words to me I too had wives—their names Ostryth and Acha. I took them both within a week. The first was very beautiful to look on, a Briton's daughter, very dark, with long black hair. She was so beautiful I wondered much the king did not take her. But he had too many already, he said, besides he was just then at war and thought only of that.

Now it chanced that for the second time the woman-sickness came upon Cyneswithe, my sister. She had borne a son before but he had saved Penda the work of slaying him—he died before he was an hour old. Now once more she was in labor, and on that same day my two wives each bore a child—Ostryth a daughter, and Acha a son.

When Penda heard his wife, Cyneswithe, was sick, he sent me to attend her, and to see that her child's body was brought to him according to the custom. He would trust no one in this matter; always he must see with his own eyes that the child was dead. With a sore weight tugging at my heart I went. Cyneswithe was my sister, her child would be of my own blood and race; yet what was there for me to do?

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If the deed was not done I and all my house would die.

Murder it was no doubt, but to save the many the one must suffer. I went to the house of Penda's wives. A guard was at the door. I told him my business and he let me pass. I entered Cyneswithe's room and finding her maids there I bade them go, and was left alone with my poor sister. She saw me enter but she gave no word of welcome, only she hid her face and I could see her body shake with sobs.

I came to her and laid my hand upon her shoulder. Still she spoke not. I could see well she knew my errand.

"Sister, weep not," I said. "Frigga will give thee safe delivery."

"I weep not for myself," she sobbed, "but for my babe. Oh, cruel, wicked brother! I know thou'rt come to slay it."

"My heart aches for thee, sister," I answered, "yet what is there I can do? It is the king's command. The babe must die."

"My brother, save it, save it!" she cried, holding out her hands to me in supplication. "Oh, save my little one! Take it and fly from this cruel land, and I shall die in peace knowing it is safe."

Then, though my heart was water, I grew stern and said:

"Wife of a king, it ill becomes thee to take on like this over an unborn brat. Thou art the wife of Penda, Penda the Strong, the Glorious. Put off the woman then and play the queen. What? Wouldst thou blubber like a girl, thou that art Queen of Mercia? Shame on thee for a weakling."

She wiped away her tears indeed and sat up in her bed, though she was so sick. With fists outstretched and fire in her eyes she cursed me like a witch, me that was her brother, me that she once loved; she called down from heaven a hundred curses on my head if I dared do this deed. Lords, I was afraid to face her and turned my head away.

Just then the curtain of the doorway parted, and Penda's mother entered. I bowed my head before her, for in those days among the heathen peoples the mother of a king was greater than his wife.

"Edbert, what means this scene?" she asked. "Why does thy sister weep and curse thee?"

"Because he would take my babe from me and slay it," Cyneswithe cried.

"Child, it is Penda's babe," she answered, "best let it die. 'Twill only be as Penda was, and is, and only sorrow will it bring to thee and us."

"Nay, nay, O, Queen! my heart yearns toward the babe, and I would feel his little arms about my neck and see him sleep upon my breast. Ah, slay him not!"

"Child, 'tis more like that he will bite and scratch as Penda did. Best let him die."

What need to tell the rest, lords? Cyneswithe's pleading so worked on our hearts that we talked together of how we could save the child; yet could we find no way. Then spoke Cyneswithe:

"Hearken now, mother, and hearken thou also that would slay thy sister's child; thy wife too, Edbert, is in labor today and will bring forth a babe. Know this now once for all, I will not have my babe slain, or if he dies then ye die with him, for I will say to Penda that ye plotted against him as ye are doing now, to save his child. Now hearken both of you. The child thy wife bears to thee, Edbert, he is the one must die, and thou must take him to the king and show him for my son. It is the only way. It must be done. Wo to you both if ye fail me, for if you do, ye die!"

She looked at me for my answer. Consider, lords, in what a pass I was—ordered on pain of death to kill my child. How could I do it? Nay, it was impossible.

"Swear it!" Cyneswithe cried. "Swear it now both of you, and quickly!"

We swore. We called the gods to witness we would do the deed, yet in my heart I purposed to defy the anger of the gods and save my child.

We left Cyneswithe's presence for her pain was on her, and I went to my house. I found Ostryth had borne a girl an hour before, and Acha a boy but half an hour after. The boy was dead. Ha, but the gods were with me! Now I knew what I would do. How I rejoiced in my heart that my son was dead. Inhuman joy you will say, but not so; it saved me from a murder. I sent all the servants from the room.

"Give me this child, wife, that thou sayest is dead," I said quietly.

She pointed sadly to the body lying at the foot of her couch, and wept. I took it up pretending to examine it.

"He is not dead," I said.

"Mock me not, man. I know that he is dead!" she sobbed.

"Acha," said I, "I will take him to the

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temple of your gods, and lay him on the altar. I will beseech the gods for him, perchance they may let him live, for I tell thee that he breathes still, albeit he is almost dead."

I WAITED not for her answer but rolled the body quickly in a cloth and took him to another room. I tied a cord about his little neck and drew it tight, then rolled the body up again and carried it to Penda.

"Ha, so thou'rt come at last!" he said. "Show it me."

I unwound the cloth and showed the body. He looked upon it earnestly and long.

"He looks not like my other sons when they were babes," he said. "I suppose there must be runts in every family though. This child does not resemble me; he looks much like his mother. He has no touch of Penda in him. If I did not know he was my son I would think he had another for his father. By all the holy gods!" and Penda rose from his seat and brought his great fist down with a crash upon the table, and his face grew black as night. "If I only thought—but no, what do I say? That is impossible. She would not dare to play the harlot, and what man is there would dare to toy with Penda's wife? Enough! Enough!"

He put his face close to the child's and looked long at him.

"Edbert, I am well pleased with this child's looks," he said, "for he is beautiful as his mother is; and being like his mother and not like me he would not be ambitious, for he would be gentle and obedient. No danger then of Penda dying at his hand. Edbert, didst think of this before thou slewest him?"

"Nay, King," I replied, "I only thought to obey the king's command."

"Edbert, I am not well pleased with thee for this," he went on, "why camest thou not to tell me how he looked before thou didst murder him? Unhappy man, wast not afraid to murder the king's son? Why should I not denounce thee for this crime and have thee bound upon the altar and offered up as a sacrifice to Thunar?"

Now, lords, I was afraid, but I remembered that of all things Penda despised a coward. I answered, therefore, bravely enough.

"Thou badest me go and slay the babe; I went and slew it. Does not the king expect obedience? My life is thine, O Penda; then slay me if thou wilt, I care not."

His frown relaxed and he half-smiled.

"I like thy spirit, Edbert," he said, "thou art brave. Go now, my servant, and know I did but try thee. Go back now to thy wives; perchance they need thee."

I drew a long breath as I left the house, glad to get out of that nerve-racking presence, and went back to my sister. The king's mother was there.

"Tell us quickly how things went," she asked.

I told them all.

"Come hither," said Cyneswithe, and when I went to her she threw her arms about my neck and kissed me.

"Thou art my brother once again!" she cried. "Edbert, I thank thee. Now take my child and give him to thy wife in place of hers."

I took the boy—he was asleep—and gently covered him in a blanket for fear that he might wake. I took him hidden inside my mantle to my wife's chamber.

"See, here is thy child," I said, "the gods have given him back his life again. Take him and thank the gods."

She looked at me with doubt written in her face, as did Ostryth. I laid down the child on Acha's bed. She took the covering from its head and gazed at him.

"Edbert, my child was small and dark, this one is fair and very large."

"How could he be otherwise when Woden breathed upon him," I answered. "If he is thy child and mine, remember he is Woden's too, for Woden has just given him more than half the life that is now in him, therefore he is large and fair as Woden is."

"Has Woden then a dark mark on his shoulder," she asked, "as this child has, and as the child I gave thee had not?"

"Aye, Woden has; Geirrod smote him there when Woden fought him."

She looked hard at my face.

"Woden is fair, you say, yet this child has dark eyes, as dark as Penda's. He is not the child I gave thee, husband, neither will I nurse another woman's brat. Take him away!"

She pushed the child away so that he cried. Then my wrath rose up against the woman who would thus play with death

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and bring destruction on us all. I cursed her roundly, and with a heavy stick I threatened her. I called upon the gods to make her barren, to bring disease and pain upon her for her sin against them. I said I would accuse her to the king, and have him loose our marriage bonds so I could cast her off.

Never was I in such a pitch of rage. She wept and sobbed, she cried aloud in terror as I went on. Then finally I made her swear that never would she mention this again. Only on this condition would I forgive her, and call back all my curses. She swore, yet always after I was afraid of her. I had good reasons for my fears as it turned out.

As for the babe, we named him Wulfhere, and the girl whom Ostryth bore we named Elflaeda. The fairest maid in England she became, and Wulfhere loved her well and she loved him.

CHAPTER VII

HOW EANHERE, THE BEAR, CAME TO MEADSWELL

THE time went on, the weeks, the months, the years, and from a babe Wulfhere became a stalwart lad. Fair face, fair golden hair he had, but dark brown eyes that flashed fire when he was wroth. In form he promised to be another Penda, in face, save in the color of his eyes, he looked like Cyneswithe, his mother. I, Edbert, whom men thought to be his father, loved him as my own son. I taught him how to wield the battle-ax and how to cast the spear. Sword-exercise I taught him too until he began to be as skilful at the art as I was, and I must needs find a better teacher for him.

I have said that Penda's thanes, Immin and Eafa, were my friends. Save the king alone there was none could wield the ax as Immin could, and in all the host Eafa was most skilled with the sword. For my sake, and because they too loved the lad, they taught him what they knew about these weapons, until he soon had all their skill though not being yet a man he lacked their ponderous strength.

As a lad he loved to hear the scalds sing of the mighty deeds of heroes, and with all his heart he longed to be like them, so that his name might be remembered as theirs were. To this end he never tired of practising his warlike skill upon the other lads till they all feared to face him. He would get a score of them to arm themselves with heavy sticks, then range them in two lines before him. Then with a heavy stick in his own hand and bidding them beat him back he would shout—

"Now will I show you how great Penda breaks through his enemies!"

And he would charge down upon them like a giant. Heads were bruised and sometimes bones were broken in these contests, for some of the lads were brave and strong and liked nothing better than to get a good crack at Wulfhere; but though they opposed him manfully and sometimes even drove him back, always in the end he would break through. In wrestling also he had no fear, and he was always tearing up huge stones and lifting weights to test his strength.

Now it happened on a day when Wulfhere was scarce grown a man, the king called all his thanes and mighty men together for a tournament wherein all could show their skill and strength. Only those who were full-grown men were allowed to take part in these contests. The sports were held in an open space in a grove of poplar trees below the hill on which stood the king's dwelling.

This open space was surrounded on all sides by trees, and in the shade of these the whole town watched the events. The ground under the trees was higher than that in the lists and gradually sloped upward, so that those behind could see easily over the heads of those in front of them. At one end of the grounds the king sat on an oaken throne. I, Edbert, stood at his right hand, Eafa at his left, and great Immin towered behind his seat. His guards were drawn up in the rear, and over to one side sat Penda's wives with their ladies and attendants.

When all was ready a herald stepped forward and sounded his horn for silence. He invited all to take part in the contests, that they might show themselves to be good men and true. He then announced in a loud voice the first event.

I can not tell you about all of them, lords, nor who won them; I wish to tell you only of those which would be of most interest to you as they were to all there. The less important contests came off first,

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namely, the shooting with the bow and arrow, the fight with the quarterstaff, the hurling of the stone and the foot-races. After these came one that caused great excitement. A heavy oaken block was brought into the ring by a stout churl who laid it down before the king and fixed it to the ground. Penda arose with his ax Skull-Cleaver in his hand. He swung it above his head and with terrific force he brought it down upon the block.

The blade sank deep into the wood and Penda left it there and resumed his seat. One after another the warriors came forward, and each strove to tug the weapon from the block. They puffed and groaned and sweated, but not one moved it by so much as a hair's breadth. Then last of all Immin tried, but though the stout steel handle bent as though it would break, and once a *creak* was heard, as the blade moved ever so little in the wood, he left the weapon still embedded, and, panting, resumed his place, amid the cheers and laughter of the crowd.

Now there came forward a man with a great bearskin, brown and white, hanging over his shoulders. He was of a fierce countenance, not so tall as some, though he would be counted a tall man, but with great breadth of shoulders and chest. He wore a bushy flaming beard with a long mustache, and his long hair, red as fire, fell to his shoulders. At his belt he carried a huge red ax, unlike any battle-ax that I had ever seen, two-bladed, and heavier even than Penda's. The king and his thanes stared at him in wonder as he came forward. He saluted the king, then bent his back and put his hands upon the handle of Skull-Cleaver.

A mighty heave that made the great muscles stand out on his brawny arms, and the blade creaked as it slipped slowly from the block, and the next moment the stranger handed Skull-Cleaver to its owner. The strong man stood there a moment to get his breath, then taking his own ax from his belt, with all his power he swung it above his head and brought it down upon the block. When he raised the weapon again it was seen that the wood was split in two equal pieces which lay on the ground a yard apart.

Penda arose and addressed the newcomer.

"We give thee welcome, Sir Stranger. That was a marvelous stroke of thine, and never has the like of it been seen in Meadswell. We welcome thee the more gladly as it is a long time since any stranger has graced our sports, though by our rules all men are free to take a part in these contests, and to share with our victors any prizes they may win. I trust we will see more of thy prowess before the day is done."

The stranger thanked the king for his words and went back to his place.

Next came the sword fight. The stranger loosened a broadsword from his belt and strode forward once more. Three brawny swordsmen advanced toward him, but when they saw Eafa whom none could vanquish stand forth also, they at once retired. For a while the result of the contest stood in doubt, till the "Bear"—for so they had begun to call the stranger—with a sudden twist of his weapon jerked the sword from Eafa's hand and sent it clanging to the ground. It was Eafa's first defeat, and with bent head he took his place beside the king, while Penda frowned on him.

THE herald next announced the javelin contest. A block of oak was hung against a poplar tree. This was the mark at which the javelins must be hurled. It was fastened tightly to the tree about five feet up its trunk. Six contestants stood behind a line drawn thirty paces before the tree, rolling sleeves off their right arms, shaking their spears and otherwise making themselves ready for the fray. The Bear also took his place beside them, but merely leaned on his great spear.

"Edbert, methinks yon stranger will give a good account," Penda said to me, then rising bade the Bear throw first.

The stranger bowed, then seizing his javelin by the middle he stepped up to the line and lightly cast it at the mark. It was a huge lance, heavier by half than those of any of the six with him, yet he threw it as though it had been a reed; then without waiting to see where it hit he turned about and took his stand where he had been before.

"A fair shot," said the king as he saw the shaft hit the block half a hand's breadth from the center and bury itself three inches in the wood. Now the rule of the contest was this: each man must

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have three tries, and he was the victor who sent his weapon not only nearest the center but deepest into the block. It was a test of strength as well as skill.

Next Eafa, one of Penda's thanes, cast. His spear hit close beside the Bear's, but outside it, and not two inches deep. So all six hurled their lances, but only two, Pybba's and Eawa's, came closer to the center than the stranger's. And now the Bear stood forth again. This time it was clear that he meant business. He shook his brawny arm and rubbed the muscles to make them supple. Carefully he measured the distance between him and the tree with his eye. He seized his javelin and stepped up for the cast. It was plain he meant to make this his last throw.

The weapon rose above his head; it hissed as it cleft the air and drove on to the mark. The stranger leaned forward to follow it in its flight.

"Ha!" he exclaimed as he saw it bury its head in the very center of the block.

A great cheer rose from the onlookers. It was a splendid stroke. Four of the contestants withdrew. The other two tried their best and came very near the stranger's mark, but not quite near enough.

The king rose in his place.

"What! Mercians, would ye have a stranger put ye to shame?" he cried. "Is there no man here to uphold the honor of Mercia?" And he looked around among his warriors for a response, but none answered.

"King, I will try," I said, and took my spear and went forward. Now I have told you, lords, already, that in hurling the lance I had few equals. I could not hope to pierce the block as deeply as the stranger had, for I did not have his strength, but perchance I could reach the mark as he had, and this would be doing something for the honor of Mercia. I made some preparations, and as the multitude looked on in earnest silence I cast my spear. It fell within a finger's breadth of the stranger's mark, and a shout of encouragement went up.

"Thou'lt do it yet, Edbert!" cried Penda.

I shook my head as the lance was handed back to me.

"I must not miss this time," I said within myself. "Penda will despise me if I do."

I tell you I prayed hard to great Woden as I prepared to cast again. My light javelin sang as it sped from my hand. Every eye was fixed on it as it flew, and a mighty cheer went up as it was seen to bury itself in the very mark the stranger's lance had made. Now his lance-head was larger than mine; it had therefore partly opened up a way for mine to enter. For this reason mine had penetrated twice as deeply as otherwise it would have done. But even then when measured it lacked almost a finger's breadth of the depth of the Bear's weapon.

I walked back to my place beside the king. I looked at him hoping to hear some word of praise from his lips, but saw only a frown on his face.

"I would to Woden, Edbert," he growled, "that thou hadst a man's arm on thy body and not a woman's!"

Now so keenly did I feel the prick of his unjust words that my spirit boiled with indignation. I cared not if he slew me as I answered.

"King, I have done my best; thy words are a base injustice and unworthy of a king. There is no man in all England can do as this man has just done."

I thought to see him rage against me, and was surprized to see him only laugh aloud as he replied.

"No man in England sayest thou? Yon man is but a boy, and he has well done what any boy should have the power to do. Now will I show you what a man can do."

To every one's amazement Penda rose and laid aside his robe. 'Twas long since he had taken any part in these contests, but now that an outsider threatened to carry off the honors from his people it behooved him once again to take a hand.

He bared his great arm as he stood before the line, and all could see 'twas mightier even than the stranger's. He grasped his weapon, also greater than the Bear's, then taking careful aim and putting forth his full strength he sent the javelin hissing to the mark.

Ten thousand throats yelled out their delight as the spear entered the mark the Bear's had made, split the oaken block in twain and buried its point in the poplar behind, where it hung quivering for a moment, then fell with a clang to the ground.

Penda raised his hand for silence as the stranger approached him.

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"It was a mighty throw, King Penda. I have visited every tournament in England, but never saw I yet a stroke like that."

"Nay, nay," Penda replied, though one could see he felt gratified with the praise, "thy javelin only prepared the way for mine. Thou couldst have done the same if thou hadst tried instead of me. We are quits now, Sir Stranger, for have we not each split a block?"

The Bear said nothing, but turned and went back to his place under the tree.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW EANHERE'S BEAR FOUGHT IMMIN'S THREE DANE DOGS

IT WAS the custom at these contests to vary the proceedings by introducing wild-beast fights. Two fierce black bears were led by chains into the middle of the grounds, growling and snarling and snaping, as they passed, at the onlookers, who drew back hastily to avoid them. Two keepers managed each, and they had all they could do to get the animals to their posts. A wooden cage was next dragged forward, containing a huge bear, brown and white. He was of a kind seldom seen in England, though it was said that far off in the haunted mountains on the west borders of Mercia many lived.

It was noticed that the tips of his ears were lacking, and the front of his long neck, his broad chest and belly, were white as snow, the upper parts of him being brown. He was larger than any bear ever seen in Meadswell. A ring of soldiers with leveled lances surrounded the three bears. The blacks strained at their chains as if anxious to get at the brown. A keeper slid back the bolt of the cage door, and the great beast walked slowly out into the open.

There was a dignity about his movements as he looked first this way and then that, uttering a deep growl as he saw his way of escape cut off. The keepers loosed the collars from the necks of the two blacks, snarling and spitting and eager for the fray. With a bound they made for the great fellow before them, who raised his head and right paw and braced himself to meet them. With a tremendous rap that would have killed a man he caught the foremost on the head, and the black went sprawling to one side half-stunned.

The brown raised himself on his haunches as the second came, then threw himself upon him and sank his teeth into the black's neck, lifted him bodily and shook him till those around could hear the snap as the neck broke, then threw him down. The first bear returning to the attack was treated in the same manner, and then the victor, as if nothing had happened, resumed his slow pace this way and that, to see if there was not a way open by which he might escape. So quietly was it done and so swiftly, full half a minute passed before the multitude so far recovered from their tense excitement to lift up a cheer.

And now four great Dane dogs are led into the ring, huge fellows, their sinews standing out on their sleek bodies, their whole build showing swiftness and strength. In their own land two of them are held to be more than a match for the ordinary bear. Let one of them once get a throat-hold and it will go hard with the strongest bear. One Dane can pull down a boar or a stag, and three of them are equal to a lion.

"Edbert, I love that bear," the king said to me; "methinks it is not quite fair to match four Danes against him."

"It is not, King," I answered.

"See how anxiously he looks about," the king continued, "as if he realized they were too many for him."

As he spoke the stranger advanced with quick steps toward us. I noticed that the bear-skin over his shoulder was brown and white.

"King, command that one dog be taken off, I pray thee," he said earnestly. "There is no bear on earth can fight with four such brutes with any chance at all of victory."

"What is it to thee if the beast does perish?" Penda asked.

"More than thou thinkest," returned the stranger. "He is of my brethren. I only ask that a fair deal be given him."

"Every man for his own family," laughed Penda. "Edbert, command Immin that he hold back one dog."

I carried the king's command to Immin, who owned the dogs. He stormed and grumbled, for while he was sure of victory with four dogs, he feared for his favorites when only three against so powerful a foe.

The stranger made his way among the crowd, and thrusting himself through the ring of spearmen he walked with long strides toward the bear. We heard him

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speak some strange words in an unknown tongue. With a quick start the bear looked up, then with a glad grunt that was half a bark he raised himself upon his hind legs, and as the stranger came close to him he put his snout into his face and his great paws upon the stranger's shoulders, while all the crowd looked on in wonder.

We heard the man speak soft words into the bear's ear, we saw him stroke his neck and pat his shoulder, then pushing the animal gently from him he stepped aside some fifteen paces and stood there leaning on his ax.

Beside the men who held three of the dogs Immin stood, also in the ring, holding the fourth by the broad metal collar about his neck, and I could see the stranger kept an eye ever upon him.

The signal is given and the three dogs are unloosed. Five great leaps and they are upon the bear, who rears upon his haunches to meet them. *Crash* goes the terrible paw and the foremost Dane is hurled like a stone from a sling with half his face torn away by the sharp claws. The second dog grips fast the left paw of the bear, while with the right the latter crushes his body to him. We can hear the Dane's ribs snap but still he holds fast that left paw.

Meanwhile the third dog charges again and again to get at the bear's throat, and the first, torn and bleeding, leaps at him from behind. We can hear Immin's great voice cheering on his Danes, and the stranger in a strange tongue softly encouraging the bear. For some minutes things looked black for the great brute. Suddenly the stranger thunders out a command. As if in answer the bear with a mighty heave crushes the second dog to him, then flings his lifeless body to the ground.

With both paws free he reaches round and drags the first dog from his back, then sinks his teeth in the great Dane's neck, gives him a toss, and hurls his body to one side. While doing this the third dog has had his chance and seizes the bear by the throat, low down. Over and over on the ground they toss and roll, the bear gasping for breath and quite unable to use his powerful jaws; the dog, its flanks torn to bloody ribbons by the fierce clawing of his adversary, still holding on grimly.

The voice of the stranger is heard again as if in command. The bear seems to understand for he rises slowly from the ground upon his haunches, the Dane still hanging from his throat; then winding his great arms about the dog he strains him to his breast. *Crack! Crack!* We can hear the bones break under that awful hug; the Dane's lower jaw falls open, and he slips limp and lifeless to the grass.

Now when Immin saw his second dog lie dead and that there was but one left to fight the bear, in his angry excitement and sorrow for his pets he let go the collar of the fourth Dane that all through the fight had been tugging and straining to get away. Immin says he could not hold the dog but I believe he let him go. With great leaps he dashes toward the bear, now terribly weakened and almost helpless, but quick as he was the stranger was quicker, and even as the dog rose in his last leap upon the bear the stranger's ax came down upon his skull, and he fell dead.

Boiling with wrath Immin bounded upon the stranger; and now a terrible life and death battle took place between these two champions. The great axes whistled as they swung in the air. With terrible force each struck and parried. It was a battle of giants, each fighting to the death. For some minutes the soldiers around were too amazed to interfere; then when they came to their senses there was not one who dared to come between those awful strokes.

I saw Penda leap from his seat, his ax Skull-Cleaver in his hand. In a moment he was beside the fighters. I saw Skull-Cleaver flash above their heads and with a crash descend upon their weapons. The Bear's ax lay buried at his feet deep in the sod, and Immin held in his hand only a severed handle.

I can not describe to you, lords, the tense excitement of that scene. People rose in their places prepared to rush into the ring, but with outstretched hand Penda forbade them and ordered silence. With stern words he rebuked Immin and sent him back to his place, muttering as he went that he would yet find an opportunity to avenge the death of his dog; then turning to the stranger the king bade him begone quickly as harm might come to him from Immin's friends if he delayed.

"I would crave a boon, Lord King, before I go," the Bear said. "Let me take my wounded brother here with me."

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"Take him and begone," replied Penda.

The stranger spoke to the bear—a pitiable sight, the blood pouring from a great gap in his milk-white throat and staining his white breast crimson—and together they walked slowly from the ring, the crowd opening to let them pass.

"Let no man dare to follow them!" the king cried. "He dies who would do them harm!"

All watched the strange pair as they went till they passed over the neighboring hill and were gone, but mutterings of anger and revenge were heard among a group of Immin's friends stationed at one corner of the grove. Wulfhere, who stood beside this group, edged nearer to hear what they were saying.

"It will go hard if we let this man escape," said one.

"Ye saw," said another, "that he took the road toward the valley spring; let four of us stop him there."

"But the king's command," exclaimed a third.

"The king will never know," replied the second speaker, "none will inform him."

"Agreed then," said the first, and they moved away.

Wulfhere heard all. A great love for this valiant stranger had sprung up in his heart. He would follow him and warn him of his danger. He longed to be a warrior like the Bear. Perhaps he could join him and leave the land of Mercia. There was much that this man could teach him of the art of war. Yes, he would leave Mercia and go with the Bear and be his brother and see with him something of the world.

Did he not say he had visited many kingdoms and fought in their tournaments? He, Wulfhere, would learn all the Bear could teach him, and together they would win fame for themselves throughout the land, and scalds would sing of their valiant deeds and praise their names. All these thoughts passed through his mind, and then the thought of Elflaeda came to him—Elflaeda with her soft dark hair and glorious beauty—and the love of her held him back.

"I can not leave her here," he said, "I can not leave her, I must stay with her."

NO ONE might leave the games till the herald proclaimed them closed, without giving offense to Penda. Wulfhere kept his eye upon the conspirators, and when the voice of the herald was heard announcing the victors for the day, he saw the four steal quietly away. He made haste to his home, and seizing his shield and sword he took another path than that he knew the pursuers took, and after two hours' speedy travel he reached the spring.

As he had expected, the stranger was there bathing the wounds of the bear with the cool water and wiping the clotted blood from his fur. It was clear that the bear was very weak from loss of blood, and Wulfhere could see gratitude in the animal's eyes as he looked upon his master.

As he approached the bear growled and the stranger looked up without ceasing his work.

"Ha, my young friend, hast come to slay me and my brother?" he smiled as he asked.

"Nay, but to warn thee, friend. Four men well-armed are on their way to intercept thee, and they are close at hand," said Wulfhere.

"The bear is very weak; we travel slow."

"Best leave the bear," Wulfhere urged. "Thou canst not stand before four warriors."

"I will not leave my brother. But tell me, has Immin any hand in this? Methought he seemed a brave man and far from given to lying in wait like a robber for his enemy."

"Immin has no hand in it, nor knows he aught of it. These men know Immin little if they think to please him by setting four upon one man."

"Ha! I am glad to hear thee say so. I thank thee for the warning, boy, but go thy way, I have no fear of four cowards." And the man went on with his work.

"But they are great men and strong fighters. Thou hast no chance against them; best fly while there is time," Wulfhere pleaded.

"Nay, I fly not."

Now if Wulfhere was still a lad—and he was but eighteen—yet on his shoulders he carried a man's head. Courage is good, he knew, but that is a foolish kind of courage and unworthy of the name that is not guided by true prudence. The stranger would be no coward to fly before four men; he was a fool not to do so. Wulfhere's mind told him to leave the man to his fate. He had done his duty in warning him, what more could he do? He half-turned to leave. Then his heart spoke.

"This man remains to give his life for his friend though that friend is but a bear. Turn again, leave him not."

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Wulfhere stepped toward the stranger.

"Brother," he said, "I'll stand by thee."

The stranger grasped his hand.

"I know the risk thou runnest," he said, "for thou wilt be known. See, tie this scarf about thy face leaving only thine eyes bare—so."

And he fixed the scarf of cloth about Wulfhere's nose and just below his eyes.

"Now let us go thither"—and he pointed to a little mound—"and we will stand together side by side. If any take us in the rear stand back to back with me; let us not separate."

They took their stand upon the mound some twenty paces from the spring. The old bear hobbled toward them but the stranger waved him back. A minute more and they heard a crackle in the woods, and the four Mercians appeared. For a moment they paused as they saw two with bared weapons standing there against them.

"Ha, cowards, and do ye fear two men?" the stranger shouted.

The taunt had its effect, and on all four came together. One tremendous sweep of the Bear's ax and the foremost, cloven through his skull, went down. Two burly fellows took his place and another assailed Wulfhere. Never had the lad fought a real battle till now, and the joy of it took hold of him. He and his adversary were the only two with swords, and many a strong stroke and quick parry followed.

His enemy was a strong fighter and a skilful, but Wulfhere found himself the better-trained. He played with that strong man though he himself was but a boy. He could see the look of fear that came upon his enemy's face as he realized that he was in Wulfhere's power, and the lad with many a laugh and taunt drove him this way and that. Then feeling that perchance the stranger might have need of his assistance he drove his sword into the Mercian's face and stretched him dead on the grass.

He turned to see how his comrade fared.

The Bear stood leaning upon his ax with a broad smile of approval on his face. The three dead Mercians lay on the ground beside him.

"Boy, that was well done," he said. "Thou hadst the best fighter of the four against thee, and I have seen how thou didst play with him. I could not have done it better myself. What I could teach thee added to what thou already knowest of swordsmanship would make thee soon the best swordsman in all England. Come with me, lad, and I will be thy brother. I am a lonely man and would have thee to be my comrade. What sayest thou?"

"Nay, I can not, Bear."

"Hearken to me, lad; I live in the land of Hwicce and I am king over a strange people there among the mountains. When the notion takes me I leave my people and journey to distant lands, seeing strange sights, and meeting many strange adventures, attending tournaments and tests of skill and strength, and fighting many a good battle with Blood-Ax here." And he patted the weapon at his side.

"Kenwal of Wessex knows me, for I overcame his strongest men at the contest held in Winchester. Edwin of Northumbria too could find no man to stand against me. I slew the champion of Erkenbert, King of Kent, in fair fight at Rochester, and in Wales when Margadug set two men on me I overcame them both. 'Tis a glorious life, my lad; come with me, for I love thee, boy, and the whole land will soon ring with the fame of our deeds. Thou hast in thee the making of a champion whom neither I nor any man in England will stand against, save it be that giant of a king of thine. Come, what sayest thou now?"

Wulfhere's mind was torn with the desire to go, but he thought of Elflaeda again and of me, his father, and he answered:

"Sir Bear, nothing would I love better in this world than to go with thee and share thy life, but I can not. Not now—not now; perchance some time again I shall meet thee, and then we can be brothers."

The Bear stretched out his hand.

"Farewell, lad; I feel within me that thou and I shall meet again and live as brothers. Farewell."

He called the bear and slowly they made their way along the path traveling toward the west, and Wulfhere turned and went back to his home.

He little dreamed how soon that time would come when he would become blood-brother to the valiant stranger, and the fame of the Bear Brethren would be known over all England.

TO BE CONTINUED

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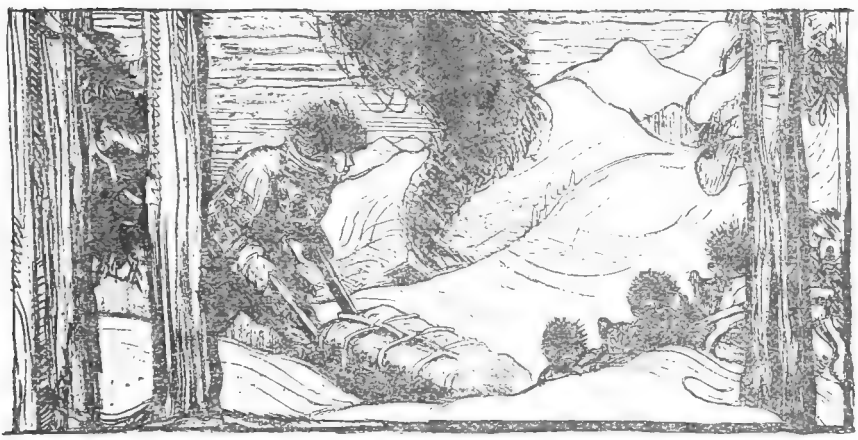
AGAIN – THE FEMALE



MONTE REINHART HAZLETT

Author of "If a Feller Didn't Weaken."

YOU'RE feedin' those brutes too heavy, I tell you! That brown bitch didn't any more than carry her harness comin' up the creek tonight. Now you cut it out! Next thing I know the whole —— team will be too lazy to pull a tap!"

A bang on the cabin door caused it to fly wide, admitting swirls of snow and wind that registered thirty and more below, and a man who paused on the step to throw back a coiled whip and say:

"The fatter those curs get, the thinner my whip. Remember that!"

Lew Haines was mad clear through. He slammed the door in the face of the storm, flung off cap, gloves and coat and dropped into the chair placed for him before a steaming supper. The trail up from the settlement was no picnic at any time, but on a night such as this it was, in the wrathful opinion of Haines, simply hell.

He rubbed his benumbed fingers and scowled at the dreary bareness of the cabin. Bedding, cooking-utensils and all, there was no more than could be rolled into a pack for a sledge. His quick, close-set eyes glimpsed every detail of the cheerless interior, and his thin lips curled in disgust as he turned from it to his meal.

What a desolate hole for a man accustomed to the scintillating joys of southern cabarets to spend his evenings in! Particularly this evening. There were to be home-made theatricals in the hall and a dance that would last until breakfast "down-town"—as in his rare moments of jocularity he termed the village. Lord, how he wished he were free to shake a leg in Old Dan Tucker's once more! He was just —— weary of going to bed with the chickens.

He caught at the word "chicken." Yes, his wife had looked like one those evenings when amidst the fashion promenade on Powell Street they had exchanged their first interested glances. But now! Good Lord, she looked just like the devil. He could not take her to the village and she promised earnestly to go into fits if left out on the claim alone nights.

But it was not through consideration of her that he was home tonight, Haines admitted as he applied himself to the well-roasted venison and the baked potatoes. That was a —— fine bunch that hung around the Igloo Saloon—he didn't think! Old she busy-bodies! Did they think he had to be sent home like a kid? This evening it had been Itchy Ike, the overgrown plug-ugly whose ears were mostly chewed off in pugilistic encounters, who

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edged up to him, watch in hand, and remarked apropos of nothing in particular:

"Haines, don't that little woman of yo'rn never kick up a row 'bout bein' left on that claim so much by her lonely? Well! Then she's too good for you, or I'm a Malemiut. Betcher she's a-scurryin' round right now gettin' supper hot for you. W'en do you start?"

Good Heavens! Would it injure her for life to stay alone just one night? It seemed to Haines he had gone through quite enough on account of this woman who now was a white elephant on his hands.

His had been a free and happy existence around the San Francisco Bay cities until she came into his life. Knowing no restraint and picking up easy money, his days had been crowded with pleasurable and exciting experiences. But now, in place of the jolly hilarity of Oakland's water-front resorts, this desolate claim with a woman who once had attracted but never had amused him!

For upon closer acquaintance it was discovered they had nothing in common except the ability to dance well together. To repent of a hasty marriage in the eternal leisure of a northern Winter Haines considered about all the purgatory that was coming to him in one life.

But how to get rid of her—short of sticking her in one of the traps he had put out a month ago as an excuse to her for their remaining out on the claim all Winter, and abandoning her in the snows! He knew that by loosening his hold upon her she would snap back to San Francisco as if attached there by rubber bands—and blab his whereabout all over the city! Well, not if he knew it!

But women were scarce in Alaska. Perhaps later he could bring about an arrangement through which he could regain his coveted freedom.

But what an infernal mess it was! And Old George was to blame for it all! Were it not that Haines desired mightily some time to return to his haunts around the bay, he would wish he'd croaked the old crab that night.

Well, maybe he had. But in case the old rascal survived, there was yet the inconvenient matter of the thousand bucks. Old George still had stanch and influential friends among the old-timers of California, who likely would be snoopy. It would be just like those old hounds, he thought, to lay all the blame on him.

What if the old duffer had raised him from a homeless waif—or rather aided him in raising himself—did that justify the finicky old rum-chaser in going back on his promise the last minute? What was it to Haines if the girl's aunt had put a crimp into the life of his benefactor in the early days when he was "Gentleman George" and she a dashing belle fresh from Kentucky?

There was that balmy Spring evening when Old George with an ugly chuckle down inside his collar had first pointed out the girl with the woman who was her aunt and guardian, and said acidly:

"There—with that straight-backed old pelican whose goat I've been after for twenty years—the fluffy one with the eyes is Magna Geary, the apple of the old one's eye. Pluck it, and the thousand is yours!"

Young Haines had accepted the commission in the light of a lark, but decided to accomplish it in his own way. He was in bad just then with a number of his pals and absenting himself a few months might prove a healthful idea. The thousand would make this a more luxurious sojourn and taking the girl along would certainly add piquancy. She was far too pretty to manhandle as Old George had stipulated.

Haines's appearance was attractive and he had absorbed many of Gentleman George's ways with women. It looked easy. But always that watchful old guardian in the way!

But the girl had noticed him, he knew, and one afternoon when she happened to drop in at the Portola with some artist friends he had managed to meet her, and they had several dances together.

Came then the collision of the ferries in a dense fog on the bay, and he had thought the gods were playing directly into his hands; for the girl was knocked unconscious by the impact, and it had been an easy matter when they limped back into Oakland mole to transfer her into a cat-boat of a friend, thence up the slough to the isolated house-boat

Oh, he'd played his cards well—treating her with every consideration and kindness to coerce her into a hasty marriage.

And hadn't he considered himself the smooth guy, though?

Poor, short-sighted boob that he was

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that he had not in the confusion of the collision slipped her overboard into the bay, collected his thousand and gone about his business!

And it would have saved him that beastly scene with Old George. Whoever would have suspected "the Gentleman" had it in him? As for handing over the thousand, which of late years had been so difficult to keep intact in the bank, he would see the young traitor in several kinds of limbo first.

To get possession force was necessary—which did not deter Haines, who was much the stronger of the two. But the means employed had been more heroic than at first intended.

An hour later he and his bride were speeding through the night on the first train out of Oakland, which happened to be scheduled for Portland. Wherefore, Alaska, and this cursed lonely claim!

They might have remained down in the settlement had he not postponed explaining to his bride the necessity of covering their tracks. Coming up from Seattle, Magna had become acquainted with the Bowens—and then it was too late.

Shrewdly concluding to risk no chances, he had kept a close watch over his wife until he could remove her far from mailing facilities out on the claim. And there he had kept her.

HAVING eaten his fill, Haines slouched wearily down in his seat, one arm across the table, the other dangling loosely over the back of the chair and in sullen moodiness watched the snow melt from his boots into muddy patterns on the well-scrubbed floor. He knew that as soon as the woman come in and he had moved from the spot, she would very carefully and in silence mop it up.

Good Lord, if only Old George could have known what he missed in never having to live up to the ideas of a fine-haired wife of her tribe, he'd have pensioned the old one for turning him down instead of planning revenge.

Oh, of course, if she had been a girl like Clarise! Lord, how her bright eyes shown this afternoon as he walked into her cabin! Black velvet and yellow chiffon. Some class and pep to a girl like her!

How cozy her rooms with bear rugs and Indian trinkets! How cheering in these diggings the sound of a piano with the nimble fingers of Clarise doing ragtime all up and down the ivories!

Then to return to this bare hovel! And the added devil of it was that in his absence the cabin of Clarise was open to Tom, Dick and Harry. Haines gritted his teeth in impotent fury.

The door opened just far enough to let in a snowy figure which at first glance defied classification. In shape it strongly resembled the sack of spuds lounging against the wood-box and was grotesque to the point of ludicrousness. Judging from a periscopic tip of nose—the only bit of the individual not entirely submerged beneath many layers of woollen garments—there was reason to suspect femininity; but the trousered legs kept one in doubt.

Haines glowered at the figure like *Little Red Ridinghood's* wolf about to devour her. A suspicion entered his soul as to what had become of some of his wearing apparel which in the past few months of increasing cold had so mysteriously evaded his search.

Well, she could have those old fur gauntlets, and the knit ones beneath; also the flannel ones she stripped off last. He had no use for the old raincoat she seemed to have appropriated.

But that red mackinaw—he could have got a lot of wear out of that yet. And, good Heavens, he had wondered what had become of his green-and-yellow sweater! He bet she had on at least three pairs of his trousers and God alone knew what all she had on her feet!

He had not actually looked at his wife before in weeks. He noticed she still bundled her head in that abominable gray thing! There were yards of it, which required much unwinding before the individual appeared on the surface.

She was a wee bit of a girl who even after eight months of the rigorous life of the north looked scarcely past twenty-three. Her large eyes were as blue as the skies of her native California and her tousled hair held the gold of its sunshine. The hair had been roughly bobbed, and as the gray scarf came off stood out in many directions.

Haines remembered well the day on the trail when he had, in a fit of rage, snipped off her long braids. How was a man to get anywhere if for an hour each morning he must mark time while his wife fussed with her too-abundant hair?

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He never hesitated to vent his spleen upon this girl, for she was too chicken-hearted to fight back. Some day when he learned Gentleman George had not joined the angel choir that night she would be all the more willing to split the blanket and go her way.

Although the stove was red in spots the cabin was far from being comfortably warm. Magna came to the supper-table in many layers of wool. Beneath it all were her own clothes—skirts tucked into the trousers and silk hose inside the heavy masculine socks.

So wadded were her legs that she waddled, rolling sidewise like an old tar. Had Haines the rudiments of humor he'd have found her deliciously droll.

In the gaudy sweater she made a bright spot in the gray room. He wondered how under Heaven after all these wretched months of ups and downs she could sit there and eat as placidly as a young heifer in a field of clover. Suddenly he blurted:

"Why don't you clip that mop of hair? It looks like the devil!"

"Hey, Lewie," she countered, looking up brightly, her dimples hard at work. "Know what I was thinking of just then? I was thinking that if I died right now and St. Peter asked me would I step into heaven, please, I'd reply:

"'No, thanks, Pete. If you don't mind I'll just makum zip-zip back to that San Francisco-town; dinner at the Old Poodle Dog and a show at the Savoy being paradise enow for me!' Oh, can't you just see the dear old mobs drilling up and down Market Street? Wowie!"

She licked the back of a spoon and regarded him speculatively.

"Now, what the —— do I care about Market Street? I asked you what you were going to do about that hair?"

"Well," she replied demurely, "I'll tell you what I am going to do about that hair. I think I'm going to let that hair grow so that by Spring when we sell out and go rolling southward it will be long enough to do up.

"Oo-oo-oo! Won't it be heav-en-lee to get aboard a boat bound for Seattle and the Shasta Limited, to watch this cold old shore receding—receding; and to know it is past—this dreary old, frozen old experience up here!

"Homeward bound, Lewie! Can we wait till Spring? I try to be patient; but oh, sometimes up here alone I think I'll blow up! An' if I'd b-b-bust up like that—" blowing her cheeks out on the "b"—"what good would money do me?"

"You make me sick," Haines remarked, turning his chair away from the table and taking a paper from his pocket. "When I sell this claim, as I'm goin' to —— soon, I'm goin' farther in to a real mining-camp and you're goin' along. Alaska is home to you now. Don't ever forget that!"

And he closed up for the remainder of the evening.

Magna followed suit, being careful even to suppress the sigh that welled to her lips. She cleared the table, washed and put away the dishes, peeled and sliced the potatoes for breakfast and placed the kindling beside the stove.

By this time Haines was dozing in his chair. The paper had slipped from his hands to the floor. Magna sat by the table and did endless yards of tatting and prayed fervently he would go off to bed and forget it.

It was merely a badly printed local sheet but afforded her great joy on the rare occasions she saw it. Usually Haines stuck it into the stove as soon as he finished with it. And there it lay just under the table.

But who knew that Lew actually slept? Not for worlds would she do anything to aggravate his present fretful mood.

Haines's chair gave a sudden lurch, and Magna's heart missed a beat. But with the quick dexterity of one long used to self-defense he threw back a leg, caught his balance, got to his feet, flung the offending chair across the floor and stamped into the partly partitioned corner where stood the rough-board bed. And Magna was left with the paper and her lonely thoughts.

THE wind shrilled about the low, unprotected cabin, and the sharp particles of snow drifting before the gale grated harshly across the one window the place afforded. The stove roared with the strength of the draft through its short chimney.

A dog snarled and another whimpered where they lay against the cabin outside. Magna yearned to call them in and arrange soft beds for them around the glowing stove. Her heart ached for them out there in the bleak arctic night.

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She harkened until they were quiet, put more fuel into the stove, dusted her hands on her trousers and tiptoed to the kitchen corner of the room. Before an old dilapidated cupboard she knelt and drew a lower drawer completely out, disclosing a flat parcel on the floor beneath the drawer-space.

Noiselessly undoing the parcel, she took out tablet and pencils, replaced the drawer and returned to the table. For a moment she sat very still, listening with her face turned toward the thinly curtained doorway of the bedroom until heavy breathing assured her the man slept.

The buffeting of the wind against the one small window drew her attention to the panes covered with more than an inch of frost on the inside. A look of utter desolation stole into the fair, child-like face, and the tender blue of the wide eyes dimmed suddenly. She squirmed herself into a tight huddle to prevent her flesh from trembling with the terrifying loneliness of the northern night.

Then she bent over the paper and began to write.

DEAR AUNTY BELLE:

My big bear sleeps and I am alone with just my thoughts of you. Are the dear slim hands all weary tonight with cooking for their inferiors? How anguished I am that you must resort to that! But grateful to the friends who gave you the start. Some day I shall repay them every cent.

"Thanks—I always *repay!*"

Those were daddy's last words when, dying, he repaid the bullet his enemy got him with. I too take joy in repaying.

When we leave here I want to give Old Indian Jim all our stuff, dogs and all. Lew has never given him a cent for guiding us on our prospecting trip, and gambled him out of all three of his dogs besides. He is such a kind old chap and with so many needy relatives.

But to dear Mrs. Bowen I can never hope to make adequate returns for her great kindness in aiding me to get letters to and from you. Is she not the pioneer to drive her dog-team away up this creek? But now the weather is growing so rough I fear she can not come again.

I fear to trust Old Soapy with a letter. Anyway, I've not seen the funny old codger in weeks. I want Lew to go up the creek and see what has become of the old man, but he says it is not unusual for these old-timers to hole up for the Winter.

As Soapy and ourselves are the only ones on this creek the trail is often hard pulling, and he can reach the main trail by going over the ridge. But I hardly think he would go to the village that way as he liked to come by here. I always give him a piece of pie or cake and chat with him.

My only real companionship I derive from our five dogs. Our leader is a big brown malemiut whom I named Bob White. He is loaded with such dignity that at times it makes him walk stiff-legged!

And the uncanny intelligence of him! When he looks me squarely in the face I know exactly what the old rascal is thinking about me!

According to Soapy, he has had a dreadful past! He will stand on three legs and with the grandest condescension permit me to work balls of snow from between his toes, licking out his tongue in sympathy with my efforts, the drollest expression of priestly solemnity on his weather-beaten old mug.

But always I must handle them all at arm's length, if you please, for these sledge dogs have been so roughly handled. Busy Bee is the only one I'm on intimate terms with. She is not a malemiut and hates this life as badly as do I. Tom and Jerry and Whisky, named by Lew, are just plain dogs and I can't tell what they think.

Twice Lew allowed me to drive them up the creek a ways and back. It is great fun to watch their backs go bobbing along the trail in front of you!

I always take them out of the harness and feed them when Lew comes home. He misuses them so!

We had two others, but one day they fought until all gashed up. I thought my heart would break! Lew acted like a savage in enjoyment of it!

I warned him against bringing them both into the cabin at once to patch up, but he never listens to me. The moment they saw each other again they began all over. I scrambled to the top of the wood-pile in the corner and screamed.

Then Lew took a hand with the stove poker and—aunty—it was the most frightful carnage! Really, I've been half-afraid of him since.

Often I feel sorry for him, too. All his light, happy ways are gone. Mrs. Bowen says he must be falling under what is called the Yukon blight—which is moroseness become chronic.

It is in the mornings after he has been drinking that I am most particular how I treat him. There are moments when I long to throw flip-flops and scream, but I hold myself down and pretend I am placidly content with everything.

I sometimes suspect, though, that my poor man finds that more trying than the excitement of a good old row.... So I sit here patiently awaiting for my nest-egg to hatch into some real money.

Oh, I didn't tell you—did I?—that it was my studio fund I did without so many pretty things to save that has made this claim possible? Yes, the money that was to take you and me to New York that I might go on with my art.

Remember what I used to say about women who handed their little pile over to men? Sometimes I think the Fates have a grudge against women who are married....

If only I dared have you send me my paint-box I could keep you in luxury, dear one. Mrs. Bowen told me of the most dreadful chromo of a painting recently raffled off in the village.

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They sold two hundred chances at three dollars a fling!

These people up here starve for pretty things and will accept 'most any kind of substitute. And such big-hearted folks, they are, too. I only wish I might see more of them.

When Lew sold his traps I thought we could move to the village. Do you know, he actually supposed I could run the traps! Could you imagine me taking the life of anything—even a trapped animal?

On my walks before the snows came, I always carried my father's derringer—which you know I had in my hand-bag that night. I thought it was gone until one day I found it among Lew's effects. Being hard put for diversion I sometimes shot at stumps, and if I got close enough I could hit a real big one. Oh, I feel quite like a pirate as I stick my gun in my trouser-band and go marauding down the trail.

Anyway, I did the day I happened to go down the trail after Lew had started for the village, and discovered the fat letter I had given him to mail you, torn to bits and strewn along the way! I hit two stumps in succession that day 'cause I was so ripping mad. But never mind, my aunty-mother, this also shall pass; and our lives shall again converge and go flowing happily on together.

I can think of no other way my little fund could gather unto itself such big interest as it is here. We are likely to sell any time. Then I shall make a bee-line for New York and wire you to join me there. After what happened I don't want to return at once to San Francisco.

Lew says he is going farther in; but the new camp is too raw and rough a place for me. If he will be fair with me I shall have enough to get nicely settled in New York and send for you. I was making good money with my sketches before Lew came along and upset our plans, and I can do even better in the East....

And, oh, aunty, there shall be art galleries and music and books and just oodles of real people! Is there still such a world of things? Or do I but dream, huddled here in the snows like a scared partridge listening to the howls of the ravening wolves....

Anyway, dearest, we must make believe we are yet to be together, and that I am to become a great artist; for without some such belief I think I should go off my head.... But please don't let this fret you, for it is but loneliness which can be quickly cured when the time comes. So keep the corners of your mouth turned upward! Who knows but that I may yet mail this in Seattle?

Anyway I am possessed of a strange feeling of renewed hope. Whether it is this eery midnight hour or the glamour of my dearest wish I know not.

But that we are to meet soon comes to me with the force of a sudden, happy hunch.... "A something whispers in the air"....

Well! I shall be whispering in the snow unless I get to bed. If my beloved awakes and finds the light still burning—Good Night!

Yoh lil' ole lovin'

MAGNA.

NEXT morning at breakfast Magna slipped her husband the information that she would accompany him to the village for the day. Instantly he remembered that the sledge needed tinkering, which would keep him home.

The following morning he sent her into the house for his other gloves and was well on his way before she came out. By the third morning, with Magna still insisting, Haines' temper reached a white heat. It was the first time she had ever been exasperatingly persistent with him, and with all his might he resented her assumption.

He stood on the runners of the sledge and scowled down at her as if she were a stray puppy yapping at his heels. His pale features contorted with the nerve-strain, and he swung his long whip viciously, barely missing his wife but slashing across the eyes of Busy Bee instead, which hurt Magna almost as much. The dogs shot into their collars, and another moment the sledge was far down the trail with Bee whimpering beneath the cutting strokes.

Magna dragged back into the cabin, huddled down by the fire and fought to keep back the tears and to forget the piteous yelp of her favorite. She pulled herself together by forcing thoughts of the sunshine and balmy airs of her native southland.

Since the Autumn rains the Marin Hills would be trailing robes of greenest velvet, and fragrant airs would go creeping up under the fronds of the palms and tickle them till they all went flip-flap, flip-flap!

Relaxed, she got to her feet and went to work—to slaughter the hours. She brought in snow by the tubful and melted it and swept and polished every inch of the interior with a damp cloth. To scrub was impracticable as water on the floor this morning would freeze before it could dry.

She moved everything in the house except the stove many times, trying them out in new positions. She laid an imaginary banquet and had Aunty Belle and all her friend in for the doings. She had in all the children she had ever seen and played games with them until she was out of breath. She did yards of tatting and played solitaire and prayed fervently that she might be given strength to retain her reason and to get her letter to the post next day in time for the next boat.

She desired intensely just to stand on

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the shore and watch the boat pull out. Seeing it steam away without her would be exquisite torture, to be sure; after which would come a modicum of relief as from anything else which draws to a head and vanishes.

The supper-hour came and passed with no man in sight. It was well on toward midnight when she heard the sledge coming up the trail. In coat and scarf she waited to attend the dogs.

When she stepped out she noted a new pair added to the team, and that back of Haines's sledge came another drawn by a string of big huskies. Haines sent her back peremptorily. He came in soon after with a stranger whom he did not condescend to introduce, and exclaimed:

"Hurry up, squaw, and hustle us some grub. Then pack your duds. We're off to the new camp early in the morning."

Magna froze in her tracks like a startled animal and regarded him silently with parted lips and wide eyes.

"You heard what I said. Now get busy!"

Without a word she turned to the stove and soon had a hot supper on the table. When they had eaten she asked for further information.

"Sold the claim," Haines grunted. "I am just —— tired of this infernal hole. By ——, I'd not spend another week here for all the gold in the Yukon.

"Everything is settled, and you don't need to worry about anything except packin' your junk. Or come along without it. It will be three days' mush and we're startin' early. No stalling! Remember that!"

Understanding his wife's opposition to selling before Spring, he put on all the front he could. Besides he ached to prove to Joe Rogers that at least in his own house his authority was good.

Those cursed bums at the Igloo had thought they were almighty funny tonight! Had it not been for Rogers he'd not have escaped with his hide—and after he had treated them all so freely, too! Suddenly brightening, he said:

"Good Lord, Rogers, you don't know how glad I am to get out of this! With some ready cash once more in a new camp I bet I'll cut some ice!"

His hands came to the edge of the table and his fingers rippled through the motion of dealing out the deck. Magna saw, and a chill of dread and repulsion crept through her.

She turned to the stranger for verification. He was big and burly, typically Alaskan and kindly. He nodded his bushy head and said:

"Lew's right; he did. But I don't think he was right when he let this here claim go for seven thousand dollars—if it pans out anywhere near as good as they say. But that's Lew's business. He sure acted like he was in one —— of a rush to sell.

"But, little woman, you won't have to mush on in the mornin' without your chattels. There's no such wild stampede as that."

He pressed the tobacco into his pipe and accepted the match she held ready. Looking down into the kindling bowl, he thought this was a mighty fine little woman, and——, she could cook! Not such a bad proposition to have along. Sinking his chin in his thick beard, he pulled on his pipe meditatively and finally said:

"Lew, I'm goin' to get an extra early start in the mornin' so's to cut off the trail up here an' make a look-in at Old Soapy. They tell me he ain't been seen for quite a spell now. He's a comical old toad, and I'd not mind seein' him again.

"That will let you over the ridge and on to the out trail sometime before I hit it. But I'll soon catch you up, and then your wife can ride on my sledge. I always take along plenty of dogs, and my pack isn't a quarter the size yours will likely be."

With a gambler's quick perceptions Haines read, and resented, the deep pity for the woman in the quizzical eyes of the old prospector. Glancing at the bulk of him, he replied cheerily:

"All right, Rogers. But you'll have to hustle if you get in sight of us after we reach the big trail. Those new huskies of mine are goers!"

THERE was no sleep for Magna that night. Before retiring she gathered up the things they would need on the trail, going about noiselessly so as not to disturb the big Alaskan who snored uninterruptedly in his blankets on the floor.

She moved as in a daze—for hope and courage had fled. There were volcanic

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fires within, but she supposed them forever quenched now.

Some time toward morning Joe Rogers was up, made himself a bite of breakfast, hustled the dogs into the harness and was off. It was a new experience for Magna to dress by a warm stove, but she scarcely even noticed it.

It was some hours later that Haines regained sufficient consciousness to pull on his boots. He had gone to bed with a bottle of brandy and the determination to give Rogers plenty of time to get on to the regular trail—even allowing an extra hour or so to bury Old Soap if that were found necessary.

He guessed he was man enough to get himself and the woman over the trail! That big bushman could drive his dogs' heads off and be in camp before he discovered he was in the lead.

He came to the fire his hair uncombed, his face pale and deeply lined. And he was in a frightful mood. Too many drinks the night before together with the consciousness that several thousands of dollars in the value of the claim had to be sacrificed to another just because Murphine of Alameda, never his friend, happened to come in on the boat, completely unstrung him. Lucky for all concerned, Haines thought, that Murphine since disembarking was too ill to be about town.

He glowered down at his wife sitting by the stove, Busy Bee partly in her lap, bathing the dog's badly swollen eyes. He wanted to curse her for her foolishness, then refrained—remembering he had to bring the dog in on the sledge the night before because her eyes were entirely shut. If it would enable the cur to pull her share and save his own strength, let her go to it!

Magna sprang up, washed her hands and hurriedly placed his breakfast on the table. Then, still without a word, she returned to the dog with warm, drying flannels. When her husband had finished eating and sat back in his chair, Magna spoke.

"Lewie, I can not go on this way any longer. I am going back to civilization and Aunty Belle. And I'm going on the boat that leaves today.

"I'd only perish with cold if I attempted to take the long trail at this season. Besides, it is useless for me to try to live in the unspeakable environments you would drag me to.

"It was my money that enabled us to hold this claim. Let's divide fifty-fifty and be done with this horrid farce."

"That's right! Throw that in my face, will you?" Haines shouted, catching at her reference to the money. "I've been lookin' for you to begin that!

"Well, you're goin' to the new camp an' don't you ever forget it. Oh, you'll come down to earth after you've spent a Winter in a real mining-camp. You go fetch out those blankets!"

Without a word Magna arose obediently and slipped behind the curtains for the bedding. Haines bent over the dog to examine her eyes. The whip had cut in cruelly and they were in horrible condition.

He tried to pry them open to ascertain if the sight were gone. Busy Bee whimpered and jerked away.

He cuffed her over the head, then, grabbing her roughly, wedged her firmly between his knees and tore the crusted lids apart. For an instant the dog submitted, then as the pain bit in she suddenly squirmed round and with a snarl slashed blindly.

In his dulled, morning-after condition, Haines had forgotten caution, and his face was close to the dog's. Her sharp fangs caught him in the jaw, clicked together and tore out.

In that virile, strenuous land it was but a scratch. But the unprecedented audacity of the action, and from this dog, that had never shown fight beneath his whip, blinded him with rage.

He sat an instant as if stunned, and distinctly he saw red. Almost as if groping in the dark he reached out, caught the dog by the skin of her back, held her squirming above his head as he rose to his feet and with all his might dashed her against the jagged ends of the wood-pile.

Furiously, though blindly, the dog came back at him. He met her with the iron stove-poker, not once but many times. Savagely, even after life had fled, he continued to beat the furry little heap on the floor.

Rigid as an Indian and very quiet, her large eyes reflecting the excitement of the moment, Magna stood looking on. Suddenly Haines, the heavy poker still in his hand, turned and cast a look of such malignity upon her that she felt the prickle of icy needles all through her.

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A cringe or a protest at this moment might have proved fatal; but she did not betray even by the quiver of an eyelash the mad terror she felt. The accumulated spleen of the man was not yet worked off; the dog had died too easy. In this moment of red fury the life of the woman was quite as insignificant as the dog's—until he met the look in her clear, searching eyes—human eyes.

In the instant's hesitation a drop of warm blood, chancing to fall on his hand, recalled his wound. Clapping his hand to his face, he fetched it away wet and red, and the look he turned upon his wife was filled with consternation. She understood, and quickly bringing water and dressings deftly bandaged the swelling jaw.

FOR some time Haines sat by the stove and gave way to moody speculations. Though aware that he had smashed the one mirror they had brought to the cabin, when he had mumbled a desire to see the extent of the damage wrought by the dog the woman had quietly dug up another from God knew where.

Doubtless she had been making a fool of him in other ways, too. He had once or twice noticed tracks on their private trail which could not have been made by Old Soap since he had not been down for some weeks.

This and the fact the wound was not nearly so bad as he had feared rekindled his ill-temper. Well, he would even scores with her on the trail!

He sprang up and began packing feverishly. He worked with quick energy, every move counting, and in a very short time had the bedding, cooking-utensils and all packed and securely tied on the sledge just outside the door. Then he rounded up the dogs, threw them roughly into the harness and was ready to start.

All ready, he thought, except to induce that woman who sulked behind the stove to stir her wooden stumps . . . And then to get into the bright new mackinaw which hung on a chair by the door and which contained seven thousand dollars, minus the price of the new dogs, a few debts and some drinks of the night before....

With that much coin and in his present blustery mood he determined to hit the new camp with a whack that would leave a lasting impression. He strode in to the table where his fur gauntlets lay, exclaiming as he came:

"Well, get a move on! We're startin'."

His glance happening to rest on what was left of Busy Bee, he added:

"We're well rid of that —— bitch. But it makes me short a puller, and you'll walk except where the goin' is easy."

Not caring to have the new owner find the dog's body in the cabin nor the team to notice it on the ground, he stepped with it to the open door and flipped it up on the roof. Then he came back and looked at his wife.

She met his look unflinchingly and with the expression a child turns on a parent it refuses to believe will use the threatened whip. She had neither put on her outdoor wrappings nor offered her small bundle to be included in the pack; merely stood very still, breathing hard, and watched him. Now, very low and softly, she said—

"Lewie, I am not—going—with you."

Her quiet tone, contrasting so strangely with his own, nettled him afresh.

"Oh, yes, you are— Say! I could gamble you against a gold-mine if you had some glad rags on. And I'm goin' to fix you all up—an' then we shall see. Oh, I'll make a lady of you yet, my girl!"

He laughed harshly.

"Anyway, for this Winter. Women are scarce as the devil inland. Clarise went up yesterday. By next Spring you can go to ——. We'll be through with you."

He jerked on his gauntlets viciously.

"Lewie, I—am not—going——"

Magna was doing her utmost to hold her voice steady.

Haines tore off his gauntlets and slammed them to the floor, for he had forgotten to get into his mackinaw first. But before he reached it he wheeled suddenly, for into his mind flashed certain words of hers—"that you would drag me to." Drag! Ha! He had it!

"You insignificant —— fool! Now, by ——, I will tie you behind the sledge and compel those cursed lazy curs to drag you every inch of the way!"

He went out. She did not move. Her eyes rested on the open doorway and caught him up as he reentered. He carried a rope and grinned maliciously.

"Right here is where my fine lady learns to obey her big buck husband!"

He shook a loop from the rope and turned

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toward her, a rasping sound coming from between his tightly gritted teeth—but halted involuntarily as she stretched forth her left hand, palm outward.

"Lewie—" pleadingly and so low he all but missed the words— "don't make—me—do it."

"Oh, ——, no! Won't I, though! You won't balk with me again!"

He took no notice of the sharp gouge of the table-corner as he contacted with it forcibly, all his faculties concentrated on the woman who stood drawn to her full height and deadly still, awaiting him. A chair stood in his way. Without removing his eyes from hers he reached out one hand, gripped it firmly and hurled it to one side.

Three more strides and he would have her, —— her, standing there as if she were wooden! A swift movement ran through her slight figure, which he took for a tremor of fear and protest.

Ha! So the wooden statue could move? Would resist him, would it!

His body tense as steel, every nerve strained to the point of snapping, he again saw red—a red which made the flash he saw when the dog slashed him seem gray. The delirious, anticipatory thrill of the lust of mastery or of a kill swept red-hot through his blood.

For an infinitesimal bit of time this and the blur of red held him. Then again he breathed, his sight cleared and he sprang for her and was instantly and utterly confused by a blinding white flash. The cabin rang with a loud report.

THE woman remained standing and watched the man at her feet writhe, convulse, relax suddenly and lie inert. Time all but halted, the seconds lengthening into enduring hours.

After a while she walked unsteadily to the open door. The dogs lying in the snow looked up expectantly and waited.

Holding to the door-frame, she gazed at the heavy pack and slowly shook her head. She would have to tell Old Jim this was her share of the pack and trust to his credulity.

She stepped back into the cabin and closed the door. It had been open a long while and the room was bitterly cold.

Then she built the fiercest fire possible and struggled into as many heavy garments as her small body would carry. Her hands were purple with cold, her movements jerky but sure.

The bright new mackinaw was a temptation which she realized must be resisted; but sight of it reminded her of the money, which she transferred to one of her inner pockets.

Next she lugged armfuls of wood from the corner and distributed it about the cabin, piling it carefully in a way to accelerate a draft. Around the body she heaped a wall of the dry fuel.

Then she waddled over to the big can of kerosene and worked with nerveless fingers to extract the cork. Quietly and with intent she proceeded to run a dribble of oil from one point to another, being particularly solicitous not to stint the wood nearest the body.

She glanced down at the prone figure on the floor. Not for worlds would she touch it; neither could she desert it so long as there was a possibility that a flicker of life remained.

It was very, very still; had lain so for uncounted ages and not shown any sign of life. But it might regain consciousness, might even be sane and need her.

She would wait a bit by the fire. She was deathly cold and every nerve ached. Yet she must wait, must resist the terrific urge to cry out, to fling herself into the outer air and race madly off.

She had heard of other women going suddenly insane like that in the north. But she must be calm.

By sheer will-power she overcame the quiver in her flesh and forced her breathing to become less labored. She discovered it was ridiculously easy, that her brain was functioning with an intensity of concentration never before attained; yet it seemed through no volition of her own but as if an invisible force upheld her, giving power to plan and act.

Aware that her mental processes whirred with tremendous velocity, like flywheels that had slipped the belts, she realized she must do something, must contact the force with action. Then as if invisible lips spoke the name came the saving recollection of Aunt Belle and the unmailed letter. She would add a few lines.

Moving deliberately, she picked her way over the strewn firewood to the cupboard, pulled out the drawer and gathered up

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pencils and tablet, then seated herself in a chair by the stove, put her feet on the fender and began a hurried scribbling.

And in due time this is the postscript which gave joy to the heart of her relative:

AUNTY MINE:

You thought the other night when we were talking of going to New York that it was all make-believe like we used to do, didn't you, darling? And that you must go on and on serving your inferiors and that I should never, never come out of this devils' land alive and it was nonsense about our ever living happily together again as we were before—before—

Aunty, dear, I am a bit muddled. Am writing in great haste while I warm my feet.. The dogs are ready at the door....I must make all possible haste.

I am taking the boat that leaves for Seattle today....I write now because it has not yet struck in and I can!....I shall go direct to New York and wire you to join me there.

It will be very soon after you receive this, so be ready. That is, just put on your hat and make a start. I have money, lots of it, and shall make more as I study.

We will outfit entirely fresh in the East. We shall be very comfy....Don't worry.... Everything is all right....

We sold the claim. Last night Lew Haines gave the settlement folks good-by and started far inland with another man who drove extra dogs to a light sledge that could easily carry both packs.

They spent the night here. The other man was in a great rush to make an early start this morning....So Lew Haines remains in Alaska. It is extremely unlikely he will ever come out.. He won't be missed, and——

THE odor of something scorching attracted her attention and instantly her eyes turned to where the stove-pipe disappeared through the low, wood roof. The pipe was at a white heat; the wood of the roof, beginning to singe, would soon burst into flames.

It held her gaze for a long moment while she thought of the months she had guarded against that very thing, always watching with solicitous care the heated wood close to the pipe; and now—! Life with its odd quirks, its unbelievably sudden turns!

Crouching low, she drew near to the pyre of wood and remained for some time intently listening for any slight sound that might come from the floor beyond. But all was still, except the fire, which like a thing unleashed roared with aggressive threat, and the rising gale that slithered fine, hard snow coldly across the window-panes.

Suddenly a shudder shot through her like an icy blade and the interior of the cabin became to her a reeking inferno. With one movement she crammed the post-script into a pocket and made for the door, scattering pencils and writing-materials as she ran.

Just outside she tripped and almost fell. She caught her breath as she looked down at the long black dog-whip coiled about her feet.

As she snatched it up every dog sprang to his feet and stood watching her. For a full moment she stared at the thing in her hand, gripping it with all her might as if it were a writhing, venomous snake.

Then slowly she backed with averted face to the open doorway, tossed the coiled thing across the body of him who had gloated in its use, fumbled for the latch and closed the door behind her. Watching her step through the snow, she went to the sledge, planted her muffled feet securely on the runners and grasped the steer firmly.

Not until then did she notice that the excited eyes of all the dogs were focused on the cabin roof. She followed their inquiring gaze and saw a great volume of smoke streaked with sparks and snapping tongues of flame shooting up from the pipe, and little twists of smoke that wavered up from the timbers.

Then her eyes rested on the dark object lying on the snowy roof above the door. She noted the frozen grin on the tightly drawn lips, and the tail that wagged rakishly back and forth in the whirling gale.

As she looked at her little favorite, Magna's lips moved dumbly. She yearned to speak: the word, "Avenged!" struggled for articulation. But no sound came.

It was just as well, she told herself; she dared not trust her voice; for then the dogs would know! Already they knew the whip was gone. They were taut and apprehensive, sensing something weirdly unusual in the proceedings.

In a flash she turned suddenly and surprized a baneful look of speculation on the battle-scarred face of the big leader. The rest of the foolish team might waste their time on so unedible an object as a flaming chimney, but in the long head of the sagacious old veteran there was a puzzling interrogation.

It concerned his master who with bluster

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had hustled him into the harness as if in a fever to start—and now was so quiet. With a sudden gunshot he always associated a figure that lay on the ground in ominous silence to the wonderment of both men and dogs....

And what of this puny man's mate who knew not the use of the stinging whip?

Once Kaiser-Cur, alias Bob White, led a weary team driven for many days by a lone chechako who grew weaker as the days dragged by, and fed not his dogs but drove them until they became ravenous; and dropped his whip——

The big malemiut had never been the same since.

Magna stiffened as she met the look of almost human intelligence in the face of the wise old canine. *Bob White knew!*

She saw the glint of bolshevism in the hard, black eyes, and anger seethed red-hot through her. It was not unmixed with fear, for she knew his record, realized how fatal would be the slightest sign of weakness.

And this beast she had fed and tended! Her indignation saved her, for it recovered her her voice. Squarely, eye to eye, she met his gaze; tense, and called out suddenly, explosively—

"You Bob White, you!"

Her voice was clear and vibrant with command, her upflung arm imperious.

"Mush on!"

And Bob mushed, wheeling into the collar with such gusto he all but capsized the other dogs, whose attention was elsewhere. This man's mate was not so soft! And now he recalled she had often been kind. In the depths of his villainous old heart there was contrition. Very well; he would repair his mistake by hitting the trail with all his might.

The heart of the girl all but burst with the joy of a soul just released from purgatory as the racing dogs drew her swiftly down the homeward trail; and not once did she look back to where devouring flames and enshrouding snows fought to hide the past.

LONG DISTANCE

by RICHARD OULAHAN.

CHILLINGWORTH, Washington correspondent of *The Chronicle*—you may remember those stories of Washington life signed "Chil"—had told his telegraph operator to "give good night." He was alone in the office. His assistants had gone away and the telegraph instrument had been silent half an hour or so before Chillingworth instructed the operator to let the home office know that there was nothing more in the way of news to send to the newspaper. Then the operator had gone.

During that half-hour Chillingworth had been engaged in answering some of the personal letters piled on his desk, a task he

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hated. He was tired and showed it but there was no telling when another breathing-spell would come, and with grim determination he set about responding to these communications that required an immediate acknowledgment—an invitation to luncheon from a capitalist who was deeply interested in a bill pending in Congress, a request from an editor of his paper for a certain public document, an inquiry from a boyhood friend as to what was necessary to obtain a passport, a half-apologetic desire expressed by a noted manufacturer whom he knew to be informed as to Chillingworth's authority for a statement in one of his dispatches that the Administration contemplated asking Congress to revise the wool schedule of the tariff law—and a little note from Miss Patience True.

The little note from Miss Patience True had come to the Washington office of *The Chronicle* in the late night mail-delivery that a beneficent Government had provided for newspaper workers. There were few words in it. Miss True had written hastily—a "how-are-you?" note with nothing to indicate any excuse for writing it except perhaps the concluding remark that "I may drop in on you in Washington before long."

Chillingworth felt a thrill as he read and reread what Miss Patience had to say, written on home-office paper. It was only recently that he had come to realize that he was very fond of Miss Patience.

Just what to tell her in response puzzled him. He hesitated to say too much but he felt that it would be all wrong to say too little.

The telephone bell under Chillingworth's desk rang sharply. Chillingworth was startled. It came to him as he reached for the receiver how still everything was. Up there on the ninth floor of the big office building he seemed far removed from the world. The building probably was empty of human beings except himself, the sleepy elevator man and the night watchman. Chillingworth realized the oppressive quiet of it all.

"N'Yawk wants to talk with Mr. Stillinghurst," came a far-away feminine voice as he put the receiver to his ear.

"Oh, ——," said Chillingworth when he had answered. "One of the others has a beat on me, I guess."

He suspended his effort to answer Miss True's note and, irritated, waited for the connection to be made.

"Is that you, Mr. Chillingworth? This is Miss True. I'm in *The Chronicle* office.

"You didn't get my note yet, I suppose? You did? Oh, when I wrote that I might drop in on you soon I meant it, but there was no certainty about it. But now I'm actually going to Washington, and sooner than I expected."

Chillingworth expressed his gratification at the rate of forty cents a minute. Then she told him the reason for her prospective visit. She had suggested a Washington feature story to the managing editor—something to do with the wives of cabinet officers—and while the managing editor was thinking over the suggestion another thing had come up that brought instructions for her to go to Washington at once.

Oh, the other thing? Had Mr. Chillingworth been reading the stories about Paul Plute, the anarchist? Chillingworth had read them—in part; *The Chronicle* was making a great feature of them—but he had not followed the details closely. Miss True hesitated to say more—somebody on the wire might hear and spoil a good beat, perhaps one of the very biggest stories of the year; but the hesitation vanished and she told him.

Paul Plute had come into notice a few weeks before through an attempt to dynamite a big ship at San Francisco. Bombs had been found in the ship's hold. Coincident with the discovery a San Francisco newspaper had received a letter from Paul Plute identifying himself as the bomb-maker and giving details of the attempted crime that left no doubt of his guilt.

For days the San Francisco police hunted for Plute. The newspaper received several letters from him posted in the city and at near-by places, in each of which he defied arrest and threatened to make his next criminal effort more successful.

Then came a letter to a Denver newspaper from Plute announcing that he was in that city and would blow up the residence of a prominent citizen whose practises Plute condemned. Quick action by the newspaper resulted in the discovery of a time-clock bomb already placed in the vestibule of the prominent citizen's house.

The Paul Plute case became a national—even an international—sensation. From Denver, Plute went to Chicago and followed

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his practise of writing to a newspaper telling of a contemplated crime in that city. There was more quick action. When the public building that Plute had threatened to destroy was visited within a few minutes after his letter had been read in the newspaper office, another bomb was found with the time-fuse set to detonate within the hour.

That Plute was a dangerous crank was evident. That he was something of a joker was suspected. The theory was advanced and disputed that he purposely gave notice of his criminal intentions in order to insure discovery before damage was done.

But it was undeniable that his bombs were capable of doing terrific injury and that the time allowance he gave for preventing explosions left little margin for safety.

Chicago had its Paul Plute scare for nearly a week. He continued to write letters to one newspaper, each posted within the city and defying the police to find him.

In some of them he promised to visit New York, and a day or two later a newspaper there received word from him in his now familiar scrawl, which the press generally had reproduced in facsimile from his other communications, telling of his arrival in Manhattan. The postmark confirmed his statement.

On each of several days thereafter some New York newspaper received a letter from Plute posted within the city, defying detection and promising a dynamite explosion that would startle the world. The New York police were agitated. The New York newspapers put squads of their best men on the case. Public buildings, churches—against which Plute seemed to have a special grievance—and the residences and offices of great capitalists, were guarded.

Hundreds of thousands of citizens were brought to a state of extreme nervousness. Many of those who could afford it found it convenient to go to Aiken, Palm Beach and other Winter resorts, or to make long motoring tours.

MISS TRUE did not waste time and money in telling all this to Chillingworth over the telephone. She assumed that he knew it. What she did say made him start with interest and a wee bit of excitement.

The Chronicle had received a letter from Paul Plute. It had been delivered only a short time before she had put in the long-distance call. She was sitting with the managing editor trying to persuade him to let her carry out the suggestions to "do" the Washington feature story that pertained to the wives of cabinet officers when the night editor rushed in and showed the Plute letter.

Plute was going to Washington, so he said, and what he would do there would never be forgotten by the oppressors of the people. Plute acknowledged that his New York campaign of crime had failed on account of the watchfulness of the police and he had decided not to wait longer to deliver a crowning stroke in the national capital.

The managing editor had read the letter to Miss True. She had suggested immediately that he let her take the case. She would work in combination with Mr. Chillingworth and she believed she would be able to accomplish something. At any rate, why not try a woman on the story, particularly a woman who had followed the Paul Plute affair with thrilling interest?

And after some hesitation, unusual with him, the managing editor had agreed. Miss True was to go to Washington on the first train. There was none until morning and Chillingworth might expect her early in the afternoon. And she hoped he wouldn't mind having her attached to his staff for a while. And now, really, wouldn't he be glad to see her? Of course he would.

Of course he would? The conversation over, the receiver hung up, Chillingworth wasn't so sure of it. His feelings were conflicting.

Only a few minutes before he had felt a thrill of joy on the prospect of seeing Patience—not that there was anything between them but he had been thinking a good deal of her since that last visit to New York when they had seen much of each other.

There was a rift in the lute, however. It was fine to know that he would see Patience so soon, but why didn't the managing editor turn the story directly over to him? Why did he assign somebody—a woman, too—from the home office to cover it in his bailiwick? He was annoyed.

Chillingworth was a good soldier. He had been too long under that free and easy but quickly responsive discipline of the newspaper office to waste time in regrets,

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particularly when the regrets were mixed with a satisfaction that he felt more than admitted.

He walked quickly into the next room and got the current file of *The Chronicle*. With this on his desk he began reading the Paul Plute sensation from its beginning, first in the dispatches from San Francisco—very brief they were—then the fuller accounts from Denver; after that, columns from Chicago; then more columns of local stories of the hunt for Plute in New York.

Not that he read them all. He took a hasty survey of head-lines. There was no loss of time in hunting for the Plute news; it was a first-page story all the way through.

When the head-line perusal had been finished Chillingworth went back to the beginning intending to read the news articles themselves. "A bug for notoriety; crazy for newspaper publicity," was his conclusion.

A click of a door-catch made him look up. He heard a door creak, then a stealthy step in the next room, the room through which entrance was obtained to *The Chronicle* office.

It flashed across Chillingworth's mind that his telegraph operator had returned for some reason. Everything was so still that Chillingworth had an uncanny feeling. Then he saw something that startled him.

A man's face was peering around the framework of the open doorway connecting his room with the next. The face was not pleasant. A growth of stubbly beard made it unprepossessing. The eyes were piercing, wild-looking.

"What do you want?" called Chillingworth, rising.

The man's body came from behind its shelter and he entered Chillingworth's room cautiously. He glanced quickly around to see if any one else was there.

"You *The Chronicle* man?" he asked.

Chillingworth nodded, and then demanded—

"Who are you and what brings you here at this hour?"

He had regained his composure by this time and was angry with himself for having been startled. His irritation showed in his tone.

"I want to talk business," said the man.

His eyes gleamed half-threateningly.

"Sit down," he commanded.

Chillingworth's temper was rising.

"Tell me what you want or get out of here quick," he exclaimed.

Ordinarily he would have shown consideration. But the sudden appearance of the stranger, whose bearing was not reassuring, had provoked him mightily.

"I told you to sit down," said the man slowly. "If you do, all will be well. I have a story to tell you. If you do not ——"

In the stranger's hand was a revolver.

Chillingworth sat down. The man pulled up a chair and seated himself in it.

"Did you ever hear of Paul Plute?" he asked, his wild eyes gleaming.

Chillingworth pointed to the newspaper file on his desk. The page uppermost carried a facsimile of one of Paul Plute's letters.

"I'm reading about him," said Chillingworth.

The man reached over and took a pen from the desk. He dipped its point in the ink-well and with painstaking care wrote something on a slip of paper.

He ran a dirty forefinger over the facsimile of Paul Plute's signature in the newspaper. Then he placed what he had written beneath it.

What he had written was the name of Paul Plute. The two signatures were strikingly similar. Chillingworth realized that he was facing the desperate dynamiter for whom the police in cities from coast to coast had been searching vainly.

GULPING to keep down the lump that rose in his throat, Chillingworth looked keenly at Plute. The dynamiter was a man of forty-five or thereabouts, he judged. He had not shaved for days. The black stubble was streaked here and there with gray.

Color showed in the high cheek-bones. The cheeks themselves were sunken.

There was a look in the dark eyes that fascinated Chillingworth, although it was this look that made him feel uneasy. The man wore a dark soft hat. His body was clothed, for all Chillingworth saw, in a shabby overcoat, with the collar turned up. Chillingworth thought he looked hungry.

"Listen," said Plute, his piercing eyes searching Chillingworth's face, his right hand holding the revolver. He spoke with a slight foreign accent. "I do not wish to hurt you. But you must do what I say.

"My real name is Arturo Gartia. I have

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come to tell you my story. You can write it while we are here. Then we will send it to the telegraph office."

Through Chillingworth's veins leaped a thrill of joy. Here was a great story—all his own. It would make Miss Patience True feel badly to see it in print but that couldn't be helped.

The lump left his throat. The threatening tremors of body and limbs passed away. His mind became clear and active. The first thing he did was to look at the little clock on his desk. It was ten minutes of two.

"Look," he said, turning so eagerly to Arturo Gartia that the anarchist started and grasped his revolver more firmly. "If I stay here and listen to your story and then write it and after that send it to the telegraph office, I'll never get it in the paper. The first two editions have already gone to press. If I let *The Chronicle* know right away that I had an interview with you they will give it a big display in the last edition. I want to get it into *The Chronicle* office at once. I have a wire here, but my telegraph operator has gone for the night.

"Suppose I telephone to the telegraph company to have an operator come around here, and he can send it as I write it? It will be printed this very morning—a great story."

Gartia's eyes blazed with suspicion.

"Another man come here? No," he said warningly.

But Chillingworth had done some quick thinking while he was suggesting to Gartia that a telegraph operator be sent for.

"It will be printed this very morning—a great story."

That was an appeal to Gartia's craving for newspaper notoriety. Chillingworth hoped he had not diagnosed the case wrongly.

"Oh, don't be foolish," said Chillingworth soothingly. "If I don't send this story now I may never send it. Something's likely to happen, you know. Let me call for the operator."

Gartia shook his head.

"Not much," he said.

Yet it was plain that Chillingworth's proposal had made an appeal to his publicity-seeking mania.

"I let no one come here," he exclaimed quickly and with a show of excitement.

His glance traveled around the room as if he feared attack. When it came back it rested on the telephone on Chillingworth's desk.

"Can you send it over that?" he asked.

Chillingworth's heart leaped.

"Sure," he cried. "That's the thing—the telephone. I'll call *The Chronicle* in New York."

"Wait," commanded Gartia. "Do not move until I return."

The dynamiter walked quickly into the next room, turning once sharply to see if Chillingworth had stirred. Chillingworth heard him fumbling with the lock and knob of the door leading into the hallway through which Gartia had entered. He heard a click and knew that Gartia had thrown on the catch so that the door could not be opened without a key. Then another click—the double lock that could not be turned back from the outside.

Gartia returned and resumed his seat.

"Call the paper," he said.

A sleepy Central responded. Chillingworth asked for long distance and gave his directions quickly. He wanted a connection in twenty minutes with *The Chronicle* office in New York; Mr. Driscoll, yes; in twenty minutes; he was Mr. Chillingworth. And so forth.

"Now tell me your story as rapidly as you can," said Chillingworth briskly. "I must get it in twenty minutes. You go ahead and I'll take notes. First I want to know where you have been stopping in New York and how you fooled the police."

Gartia's eyes flashed satisfaction. His conceit showed in every word. It was evident that he was as anxious as Chillingworth to have his story appear.

"'Tis sweet indeed to see one's self in print," thought Chillingworth smilingly as his pencil moved rapidly, recording notes.

Five minutes passed. Gartia had become eager. He looked with wonder, even admiration, at Chillingworth's rapid work.

Chillingworth brought him to the days of his childhood. Where was he born? How old was he? When had he come to America and why? Was he married? Had he ever been in prison? Why was he an anarchist? Where did he get the money necessary to travel several thousand miles?

The man talked ramblingly, sometimes incoherently. His hobby was himself and he loved to dwell upon the events of his life—trivial, uninteresting events with never a

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real thrill in them until the last few weeks.

Chillingworth brought him to the San Francisco bomb incident. It was difficult to tear him away from the details, but the correspondent knew that there was no time for such a story as he would have cared to write. Merely the outlines were wanted by Chillingworth.

And now the Denver end. That was quickly told under Chillingworth's expert guidance. Urging by the correspondent brought out the barest summary of Gartia's Chicago experiences.

And now New York. Where was Gartia when—

The telephone bell rang shrilly. The twenty minutes were up. Gartia showed signs of perturbation as Chillingworth took up the receiver.

"You are not to tell them I am here," whispered Gartia.

The hand holding the revolver was brought menacingly to the desk.

"All right, Mr. Chillingworth; Mr. Driscoll is at the wire."

It was the faraway voice of the young woman who operated the telephone switchboard in the home office of *The Chronicle*. Then came Driscoll's sharp—

"Hello, Chillingworth."

CHILLINGWORTH briefly sketched what he had. He had interviewed Paul Plute. Yes, right in Washington. No, Plute hadn't been arrested. All that would be explained later. Get somebody quick who could take the story over the phone.

Driscoll's voice showed excitement as he called out:

"Can't you get a telegraph operator? It'll be spoiled unless you write it."

No, Chillingworth couldn't; that would be explained later also. It must be the telephone; he'd dictate the story or just tell it quickly and let somebody in *The Chronicle* office write it from his notes. Anything to gain time.

"O. K." shouted Driscoll. "I'll get Mumford. He's wonderfully rapid on the machine. Wait a minute."

That minute was spent in the home office in shifting Chillingworth's connection to another telephone with a double-ear receiver harness and in putting a typewriting-machine in place beside it. Chillingworth improved it by asking questions of Gartia.

Gartia chafed over the wait. He whispered a nervous demand for an explanation. What Chillingworth told him did not allay the suspicion that filled his mind. A tightening of his fingers around the revolver-butt showed that.

"All right, Mr. Chillingworth; this is Mumford. Fire when you're ready, Gridley. Let her go as fast as you like."

Chillingworth began to dictate. But at the very outset he found himself embarrassed. Placing his hand over the receiver, he turned to Gartia.

"Shall I tell them I interviewed you here; that you called on me?"

The momentary flash of apprehension in Gartia's eyes gave way to a pleased look. Gartia's dramatic nature responded to the suggestion. He—Arturo Gartia—was here; with a price on his head, with the police of a hundred cities searching for him, he had marched boldly into a newspaper office to tell his story.

"Yes; tell them I came here; that I told you; that I went away," he said, again in a whisper.

The lust of the head-line was Gartia's.

Chillingworth dictated rapidly. Arturo Gartia, the dynamiter, who called himself Paul Plute, was in Washington. Early this morning he had walked boldly into the Washington office of *The Chronicle* and told his story to *The Chronicle* correspondent. It was a dramatic story that Gartia told.

Chillingworth rapidly sketched Gartia's appearance. He was careful to make it more complimentary than otherwise and noted out of the corner of his eye the pleased look in the face of the dynamiter. He was gaining Gartia's confidence, he thought.

Chillingworth made the story graphic. Gartia was threatening at first and had drawn a revolver—

Something like a woman's scream sounded in the ear to which Chillingworth held the telephone receiver. It startled him.

"What was that?" he called.

"Oh, the switchboard girl, I guess," responded Mumford irritably. "Everybody's listening. All the wires in the office are connected up with this phone."

"Cut it out," came Driscoll's voice sharply. "It's getting late."

Chillingworth resumed. He could hear Mumford's typewriter clicking more than two hundred miles away. Mumford didn't seem to mind how rapidly he dictated.

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And if Mumford did not hear distinctly everything Chillingworth said he gave no sign.

And then an interruption. It was the managing editor breaking in and wanting to know how Gartia could have mailed a letter in New York and reached Washington almost if not quite as soon as the letter reached *The Chronicle* office.

Perhaps the man Chillingworth had seen wasn't Gartia? The managing editor was sharp and decisive. Had Chillingworth asked the man about the letter?

For the moment Chillingworth saw his big beat gone up in smoke. Then he remembered that Gartia had offered proof of his identity by writing his signature in Chillingworth's presence, a signature that had corresponded to the newspaper facsimile of the dynamiter's autograph. He had forgotten to mention that in dictating to Mumford. He explained quickly in the form of an "insert lead" paragraph.

"But did you ask him about when and where he mailed us the letter and how it was possible to get to Washington so soon?"

The managing editor's voice was sharper this time. Chillingworth flushed.

"Wait a minute," he called, and turned to the eager Gartia, whose face showed the thrills he was experiencing in hearing his glories recounted.

"They want to know about a letter signed with your name that came to *The Chronicle* late tonight. Quick now; did you send that letter? And how did you get to Washington so soon if you were in New York this evening?"

The eyes of the dynamiter blazed with pride. His interest in getting the story into New York without delay was now as keen as Chillingworth's.

He spoke rapidly. He had gone to the Bronx and waited near a mail-box after noting that there would be a collection soon. When the carrier had appeared, emptied the box and gone away, Gartia had mailed his letter to *The Chronicle*. There would not be another collection for hours.

Then he had walked rapidly to the nearest subway station and was soon on his way southward. He had left the subway, taken a surface car to the Pennsylvania Terminal and made connection with a train for Washington—he had figured on that from a railroad time-table.

On his railroad journey he had taken a copy of *The Chronicle* from his pocket and noted its dispatches from the capital. It had not occurred to him until then to visit Chillingworth's office. When he arrived in Washington he had stopped in the Union Station only long enough to look up *The Chronicle's* local address in the telephone directory at the station switchboard, and had taken a street-car after asking directions as to how to get to the Anapostan Building where *The Chronicle* offices were.

He had no difficulty in locating the building after leaving the car, he said. The satisfaction he took in telling of his smartness in the latter episode was obvious. To a question from Chillingworth Gartia sketched the contents of the letter.

"What's the matter, Chillingworth; why don't you answer my question?" came from the managing editor.

He showed greater irritation as he added—

"It's getting toward edition time."

CHILLINGWORTH resumed his dictation. He gave Gartia's version of mailing the letter and journeying to Washington, and Gartia's explanation of what the letter contained. Sounds that Chillingworth interpreted to indicate surprize or admiration, perhaps satisfaction, over Gartia's strategy were wafted into the correspondent's ear. He knew they came from some of the listeners at the other end of the wire.

"Only five minutes more, Chillingworth," shouted Driscoll. "Let's have the New York story. Shoot her in."

Gartia heard the squeak of the voice in New York.

"What he say?" he demanded, his suspicion intensified.

Chillingworth, his hand over the mouthpiece, explained. He wanted more details of Gartia's New York operations. The first recital had been imperfect. In two minutes Chillingworth was dictating again.

"You haven't told what became of Gartia. How'd he get away from your office? Did you notify the police?" It was Driscoll. "Let's have that fast."

Gartia started violently. He was on his feet and looking through the doorway into the entrance room.

"Stop," he hissed into Chillingworth's ear.

Chillingworth, startled, heard what appeared to be somebody fumbling with the

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handle of the door opening on the hallway.

"Say no word; if you have betrayed me you will suffer."

Gartia's whisper was threatening. Then the dynamiter, with an obvious effort at bravado, drew himself up.

"Let them open," he said in a low tone. "If they do, it will be death to all—death to you, too."

A half-smile came to Gartia's lips.

"I placed a stick of dynamite on the door-handle," he whispered. "It will fall if the door is opened. And then——"

Chillingworth's blood ran hot and cold. His peril was extreme. Apparently somebody was trying to enter the office from the hallway.

If the door was forced the stick of dynamite would fall to the ground and be detonated. And even if this did not occur he was at the mercy of an armed maniac.

While he thought this he could hear clickings from the telephone instrument that meant impatience and wonder over the delay in *The Chronicle* office in New York. But he dared not speak.

Gartia, standing with his body bent forward, eager, listening, his eyes fastened on the connecting doorway, was breathing heavily. He held the revolver slightly advanced.

How long the tension lasted Chillingworth never knew. Like Gartia he strained his ears for sounds from the hallway. But he could hear nothing and began to wonder if Gartia's alarm was not groundless.

What would anybody be doing fumbling with the door-handle at that hour? Unless it was the night watchman going his rounds.

Then——

A crash of breaking glass startled Chillingworth. It came from the window directly behind him. Chillingworth dropped the telephone receiver. He had been holding it all the time unconsciously. The receiver fell to the desk with a bang.

Gartia had turned with the crash and faced the window. Chillingworth was on his feet facing it too. The window looked out upon the street, nine stories below. A broad ledge ran along beneath it on the floor level. Chillingworth was just beginning to wonder how a window at that height could have been broken when another startling thing occurred.

A crash of breaking glass came from the adjoining room. Gartia hesitated for an instant. Then he darted toward the connecting doorway.

A third crash came. Chillingworth, watching Gartia, who had paused uncertainly on the doorsill, was vaguely aware that the sash of the smashed window of his own room had been raised quickly.

Before he could make out what had occurred the place seemed full of men. Crash again from the adjoining room. Gartia, his attention centered there, did not see the burly plainclothesman who grappled him from behind.

Uniformed policemen, ununiformed detectives, came rapidly through the windows of both rooms. They were excited and laughing over their success. Gartia was on the floor, furnishing a cushion for three of the rescue party.

When Chillingworth's mind began to work he called loudly for none to open the door leading to the hallway; there was a stick of dynamite resting on the handle.

"Dynamite, all right," said a policeman, bringing the chunk of explosive into Chillingworth's room.

"I'm Sergeant Hone; glad we got here all right," said one of the plainclothesmen. "The night watchman told us of that ledge outside your window and let us out on to it from one of the rooms farther down the hall. Your light guided us to the window. We did some quick whispering out there on the ledge and then let her smash."

The sergeant grinned happily at Chillingworth.

"Please come over to headquarters and tell your story," he added as he motioned to have the handcuffed Gartia lifted to his feet.

Most of the men in that room, the laughing, jesting crowd of nerve-relieved officers of the law, thought Chillingworth had gone suddenly daft. Without responding to the sergeant he made a wild leap to his desk. They saw him pick up the telephone receiver that he had dropped when the first crash came.

But it was not madness. It was the return of reason, the revival of the news instinct. The policemen listened and looked agape as they heard the correspondent's voice ring out over the telephone.

"Mumford; are you there, Mumford? Oh, that you, Driscoll? I can't help it if he is mad—no time to explain now. Please cut it out, Driscoll. Yes, it was glass breaking.

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"Quick now, Mumford, new lead. Be sure to date it Washington. Here she goes."

Chillingworth, his nerves under control but with the sense of the bigness of the story pounding through his veins with every heart-beat, dictated his "new lead," the introduction to what had been sent by him up to the moment that the window-crash came. He told that Arturo Gartia, the anarchist, whose operations had agitated the entire country, had been captured in the Washington office of *The Chronicle* under dramatic conditions. He sketched the sudden appearance of Gartia, the anarchist's narration of his travels and plottings, the crash of glass, the rescue by the police.

Driscoll was back at the telephone.

"Can't take any more, Chil," he said. "Dead-line on last copy. Bully story. It'll wake up the town. Oh, say"—something had occurred to Driscoll—"how did the police know that Gartia was in your office? You haven't explained that."

Chillingworth swore inwardly. No more he had. Here was the obvious thing to ascertain and he hadn't asked a question about it. With, "Just a minute, Driscoll," he turned to Sergeant Hone.

"How the dickens did you know Gartia was here?" he asked.

"Oh, that—that's a funny thing," said the sergeant. "I was going to ask you about that. A woman called headquarters by long distance from New York and said Gartia was in your office. She was excited and seemed to think you were in danger.

"We thought it was a fake but it doesn't do to take chances in our business, and here we are. How did a woman in New York know Gartia was here? That's what beats me."

Chillingworth was amazed. His brain whirled. For a moment he felt faint. Reaction from the excitement of all he had gone through seemed about to occur.

With an effort he shook himself to get a better grip on his nerves; and as he did so a thought flashed through his mind, a thought that made him tingle and flush.

"Go on to headquarters, sergeant," he snapped. "I'll join you there soon; got to stay here for a while."

The crowd of policemen, taking the now subdued Gartia with them, were barely started for the outer door before Chillingworth was calling over the telephone for Driscoll. It was Mumford who answered.

Driscoll had gone; couldn't wait; had told Mumford to say that if there were any details he wished to fill in to send them by telegraph; and rush them; there would be another edition if additions to the story justified it. Congratulations, and couldn't they let the wire go now?

"Hold on a minute," said Chillingworth. "Is Miss True in the office?"

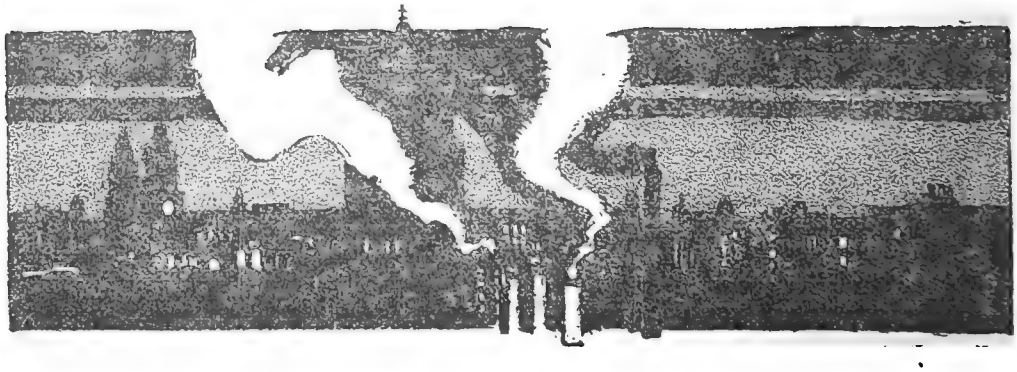
She was, and Mumford called her. Then the discreet Mumford took his typewriter and retired.

What Chillingworth said to Miss True was brief and to the point. Had she called the Washington police by telephone and told them that Gartia was in *The Chronicle* office? Yes; but had she? No, it was her beat; yes, it was.

She needn't deny that she had savvy enough to sense what was going on while he was telephoning and to call the police. That was worth a story by itself. Wouldn't attempt to thank her now, but later——

"Later will be soon," laughed Miss True. "I'm going to Washington today to interview Gartia. I'll see you this afternoon and tell you all about it. Ring off now; you've already cost *The Chronicle* a fortune for telephoning."

Chillingworth smiled happily. He remembered that scream.



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LOBO SIMMS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by

BUCK CONNOR

Author of "The Thoroughbred," "The Lightning-Rod," etc.

JOGGING down the one street of Muleshoe in the hoof-deep dust of the last days of June with all his earthly goods lashed on a pack-horse that followed close on the heels of his favorite roping-animal, rode Bob Simms, fresh from the Big Bend country and bound 'most anywhere.

From a rise just south of Muleshoe, where Simms had reined up for a brief inspection of the town that squatted pig-mean in the wide spaces of West Texas, he noted a railroad with spacious shipping-pens and an incoming passenger-train and some freighters, strung three wagons long, winding their way to the north. A scattering of horses and a round-up wagon indicated that the town was the shipping-point for the Chinita ranges; a slow, puffing freight to the east perhaps carried a June delivery of steers to Fort Worth.

Riding up to the hitch-rail of the one hotel on the one unnamed street, Simms dismounted wearily, dropped reins and loosened cinches. With a slapping of his hat against his shirt-front in an effort to dislodge the little drifts of white dust, he strode inside.

"Howdy?" he greeted the sole occupant of the room, a wizened old man whose partly bald head could be seen above the counter of the hotel office. "What's chances for a shakedown for the night?"

Old Man Wells, as every one in Muleshoe called the proprietor, looked up from his copy of the San Antonio *Express*, tilted his glasses to his forehead and spat into the sawdust box by the stove.

"Yep. I reckon we kin 'commodate yuh," he replied as he measured the man in one searching glance that missed nothing from the small feet encased in shop-made boots to the Stetson that crowned his shaggy mop of black hair.

If he missed anything in the gathering dusk of twilight it was the eyes. Eyes that were if anything blacker than the hair and set deep in sockets bordered with the tiny wrinkles that come from long rides in the glaring sun of the wide spaces.

"In fer the doin's?" he asked as he handed the stranger a pencil and turned the register around toward him.

When the man scrawled "Bob Simms, Tapidero, Texas," Old Man Wells noted his room-number in the margin of the ledger.

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"Got any stock, er did yuh come in on the north-bound?"

"Two head," replied Simms, mindful of his horses.

"I'm runnin' the wagon-yard just back uh the house here. I'll take yuh out there an' fix yuh up."

As he started for the door he continued—

"Did yuh say you was in fer the doin's?"

"I didn't say."

Muleshoe, like most of the little shipping-points on the Santa Fé that emptied the Chinita ranges of its beef shipments, was making ready for the Fourth of July celebration, and the celebration consisted chiefly of "cowboy sports and pastimes"—steer-roping, cow-pony races, bronc-riding and finishing with a cowmen's ball in the evening. Already people were arriving in town from the ranges—some with outlaw horses, and some with top roping-stock.

"What doin's was yuh meanin'?" asked Simms as they neared the gate that marked the entrance to the corral with its shed-buildings that housed feed, saddles and bedding-rolls.

"Why, we're havin' a high ole time here the Fourth," returned Old Man Wells as he twisted the valve that brought a supply of fresh-pumped water from the windmill tank. "'Most every one'll be here, I reckon. Goin' to have ridin' an' ropin' an' a heap uh stuff," the old man went on to inform him as the horses finished drinking and were being unsaddled.

"I hadn't just figured on anything like that—exactly," Simms ventured.

Inside the hotel Simms had just finished washing his face and hands and had combed his hair when a girl came out of the dining-room and rang the supper-bell. He looked up from a magazine he had picked up from the table. The girl smiled as she announced that supper was ready.

In the dining-room—a spacious room with two long tables and a sideboard that held a pitcher and some glasses—Simms hesitated until directed by the girl where to sit.

"What are you going to have?" she asked as Bob scanned the crude bill of fare.

Bob gave her his order and watched her as she walked into the kitchen. His gaze did not cease—he could see her through the diamond-shaped glass in the swinging door that stood between.

Others coming in for their evening meal seated themselves at his table and began talking of the coming celebration. They were mostly townspeople, he judged, with an interest in range sports.

"Betty, are you going to race your horse?" asked an elderly man of the range.

The girl waiting on the tables stopped long enough to tell him she would, provided there was money enough in the purse and a competent set of judges. Why, the last time—the three-quarter dash on Labor Day—she had got off away behind and was neck and neck at the wire with that Powell girl, and still they handed that girl the money.

With his face glancing up now and then and busily eating the food before him Bob Simms listened to all he heard—especially from this golden-haired girl, who was decidedly lacking in the frivolity that he had seen in so many who come constantly in contact with the public.

"Do you think your daddy will let you race the mare?" again questioned the old man. "'Pears t' me he'd just about throw a hog-wild fit if you fell er got hurt."

"Oh, dad? Why, he'd throw one anyway if he thought I'd let that bluff me and my mare," she replied and hurried to the kitchen for an order for food just as her father, Old Man Wells—himself a retired cowman—came in and joined the chattering group at supper.

He had heard through the door what his girl had said, and as he sat down she came up and put her arm around him.

"Wouldn't you, daddy?"

"Betty, you'd be no daughter uh mine to let any of 'em run a sandy on yuh thataway!"

THAT night in his room, propped up in bed with a magazine in his lap, Bob Simms had many thoughts—thoughts of the golden-haired waitress, and other thoughts, too, of the contest. Well! He'd sure stay for the celebration, and he'd sure see . . .

The smoking chimney of the lamp sitting on the stand by his bed and a crumpled periodical in the bed the next morning recalled that a tired, road-weary man of the open had fallen asleep unexpectedly the night before. He got out of bed—from where the sun shone through the window it was late—washed his face and hurried down to breakfast.

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"Good morning," greeted the girl in a voice that was cheery yet formal.

The man mumbled something about the weather, nervously gave his order and waited stolidly. From his manner Betty Wells would never dream how much she had been in his thoughts.

Fourth of July in Muleshoe was a gala day. The earlier part of the day was given over to a parade, which ended in front of the schoolhouse, where speeches were made by the more prominent men of the community who captioned Muleshoe's celebration program.

The town was full of people—range people, townspeople and those who came in on the trains. The people headed for the Fair Grounds, which lay just beyond the depot and cattle-pens, for the big contest of cowboys' sports.

After he had had his dinner Simms walked around to the wagon-yard and saddled his top horse, Sandy. When he had used a cloth and smoothed out Sandy's silky coat and had combed the animal's foretop, mane and tail, Simms took a stirrup and mounted.

At the water-trough, where he let the horse take a sip of water before starting to the field, he saw Miss Wells with a bridle in hand enter a box-stall at the farther end of the yard. He also noted that she wore a Stetson of the Carlsbad block, a blue-and-white striped shirtwaist with an old-rose-colored kerchief knotted close around her neck and a cream-colored corduroy skirt and dainty well-polished boots.

On a pretense of readjusting his *latigo* Simms climbed down and then decided that his saddle-blanket needed straightening. He pulled his saddle and stalled on the off side of his horse with an occasional glance toward Betty. But nothing came of it, so Simms, finding no further excuse for lingering, mounted and rode on.

At the large field the tiny grand stand was filled, and crowds were scattered over the open space surrounding it. The stock was milling restlessly in a corral—steers, longhorns for roping and horses that sniffed and snorted in their wildness.

Simms circled down toward the bunch of range men that sat rail-birded on the corral fence. As he rode up and dismounted several pairs of eyes were cast his way. He left Sandy with dropped reins and sauntered toward them.

"Might as well get yerself a roost," offered one of the men as he eased over to make room.

"Thanks. I'll just take yuh up on that," and Simms crawled up beside the man.

"In for the doin's of the contest?" asked the new-found friend and looked at Simms for an answer.

"Nope; just lookin' on, that's all."

A man and woman came loping across the infield as the crowd gave vent to enthusiastic applause. From under his hat-brim Simms recognized the woman as Miss Wells. The man he did not know, but he wore a white ribbon on which, stenciled in gold, was the word "Director."

They rode up to where the bunch was perched on the corral fence. The boys all raised their hats to the girl as she stepped down from her horse and let it nose the ground for the little tufts of grass that grew in the corners of the fence.

"Any one here who hasn't signed up?" the contest director asked and searched the faces of the men. "If there is and they want to enter, this is the last time around before we start the meetin'."

Betty Wells cast a furtive glance toward Simms, who suddenly remembered that he was a cow-hand and as good as any in Muleshoe.

"I guess you'd better chalk me down."

"For what events?" queried the director as he wrote down the name, "Bob Simms."

"Just give me a full slate—bronc-ridin', ropin' an' anything else yuh can think of."

The men looked his way and smiled while Betty Wells turned and, picking up the reins of her horse, walked over by one of the stage-coaches.

Several of the men came up in that friendliness of the range and introduced themselves to Simms, while a man was putting the last pin in his number that covered his back.

A visiting band from Fort Worth struck up a tune and the crowd cheered.

The first number called was the half-mile dash for cowgirls. That interested Bob Simms, so he gathered up reins and rode down toward the grand stand. Several of the girls were on the track when he got there.

A mighty outburst of clapping of hands and stamping of feet greeted Betty Wells as she came loping down past the wire. She seemed eager for the race—Simms noticed that. And Simms noticed that she

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had changed to a lighter saddle—probably one she borrowed from a relay string. From the number on her arm she would be farthest from the pole.

The starter lined them up and told them the rules of flat racing and cautioned them to come up to the flag at a slow lope.

They came thundering up the track all mixed up. He sent them back again, and shouted at them that they must get a clean breakaway.

As the other girls rode stock that had been trained to racing, naturally there was a buzzy-brained bunch of horses. Betty's mare seemed to take it all good-naturedly and obeyed her slightest wish. When they got squared away and came to the flag—a much better start than any previous attempts—the starter dropped his flag.

"They're off!" came the shout from the throats of the multitude.

The horses bunched for the pole with a thundering of hoofs. Betty held the bay mare in for the bunching, careful not to get in any of the pockets the other riders laid for her, and at the first wide opening she shot her mount straight into a gap that put her second from the coveted post.

They were just heading close to the quarter-pole. From where Simms could view the race Betty was gaining easily, although she was not urging her mare. The front line of horses—four of them—were fighting hard to hold their positions.

On the last turn of the half-mile track they held out stubbornly but still scattered. On the stretch they came puffing and panting while the crowd went wild and shouted words of encouragement to its favorite.

At the full stretch the outer horses crowded Betty as if by prearrangement. The mare dropped her head.

"Oh! Oh!" came in a chorus from the grand stand as the crowd rose as one to their feet, and the other horses jumped away from the stumbling mare.

Simms, who was the most interested spectator of the crowd, understood that dropping of the horse's head and did not wait, but jabbed spurs to his horse and took the fence in one leap just as the bunch passed, and in less time than it takes to tell it was at the side of Betty just as the mare went floundering to her knees.

But Betty was safe in the strong left arm of Bob Simms, who by sheer good luck had grabbed her from the saddle as the animal fell under the wire. The final efforts of a struggling fall had pushed the mare a nose ahead. She had won.

The crowd yelled and cheered madly and all wanted to know who it was that had saved the girl.

As Simms let her to the ground gently Old Man Wells came bursting through the crowd and offered his hand and thanked him warmly, as did many of Betty's friends.

THERE were racing stage-coaches, the wild-horse race, and then some of the men were seen leading out snuffy broncs that shied and cavorte and jumped and reared and fell over backward—outlaws from the surrounding country. Frog-walkers, side-steppers, fence-railers, sun-fishers and moon-climbers they were, and the close of the holiday promised to be an exciting one for Muleshoe.

When they had them saddled, several of the men had ridden and some had tried to ride—the air was full of outlaws and flying men.

"Bob Simms, on Torpedo!" bellowed a leather-lunged announcer from the judges' stand, and all eyes fell upon the stranger, who was dragging his saddle up to a big strawberry roan that lunged and pawed the horse which was snubbing him.

In the grand stand there was much speculation on the horse and rider, for Torpedo was a noted man-killer.

"Just snub him up tight," said Simms unconcernedly and smilingly tossed his saddle on to the middle of the outlaw's back.

The first attempt to cinch up on the *latigo* failed; the big roan commenced bucking and kicked the saddle skyward, to the amusement of the crowd.

Just then one of the punchers, seeing Simms' predicament, rode up and asked if he could stretch out the bronc.

"Sure you can, and I'll be glad if you will," answered Bob.

When with a deft twist of a small circling loop the cow-puncher caught up the left hind foot of the outlaw and set his own horse back on its haunches, Simms again threw his saddle on the middle of the bronc and cinched it up to the last hole in the *latigo*.

Then Bob gathered his hackamore reins and told the men snubbing for him to turn

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the animal's head straight toward the fence in front of the grand stand. It was done. He had reasoned that the first wild running pitch of the bronc would put them where the people could get a real show and then the outlaw would settle down to real business.

When they reached the fence the horse turned toward the wire and started pitching, squealing and biting. The rider slapped the horse over the head with his hat, grabbed with both spurs at the animal's ears unconcernedly and raked both sides in boyish glee, the while fanning himself and talking to the crowd in the grand stand.

"Whoo-p-ee!" shouted an old-timer.

"Oh, you wolf!" said another.

"You wild-ridin' lobo!" came from one who had interpreted the meaning of wolf.

"Lobo sure is right, an' y'all's got a long tail. Scratch 'im!"

"Stomp him out, lobo—lordy, watch that ridin', won't yuh!" shouted Old Man Wells.

"Ride him clean, Bob—Mr. Simms!" Betty finally made effort to shout as she threw her hat at the man.

At a signal from the judges' stand a man rode up alongside—but not until Bob Simms had satisfied every one that he was perfectly at home astride the outlawed roan. Bob dismounted when the man had taken hold of the hackamore reins and then pulled his saddle to shouts of:

"Oh, you lobo! You wild-ridin' wolf!"

HAD you been roaming around with Simms and had seen the great number of old cowmen and young that came up and offered their hands in that manner which acknowledged him a rider in any man's country, you probably would have seen the shy glances that came from the admiring eyes of the fairer sex. There was a reason for it.

Didn't he prove himself the best rider that had ever ridden into the Chinita country? And after that didn't he rope and tie a steer three seconds faster than their fastest man? And wasn't "Lobo" Simms, as all in Muleshoe had christened him, winner of the biggest percentage of events of Muleshoe's celebration?

From a seat up in the grand stand beside her father Betty Wells felt envious at the way some of the girls had tried to engage the man in conversation after being introduced to him. As Betty saw it, Lobo Simms was becoming a very popular man—a hero to all Muleshoe and the Chinita range.

After the day's sports were over Simms resaddled his horse and started for home. He had taken his glory in that manner that real ones always do—there was nothing swell-headed about him.

When he had reached the one street of the cow town and had turned toward the wagon-yard Betty dashed by with a wave of her hand. Simms was alone and Simms thought that she might at least stop running her horse—he was going the same way and would be glad to ride home with her. Not quite understanding that Betty's challenge was meant for him, he hesitated, then out of playfulness spurred Sandy to that pace which had helped him overhaul and tie his steer in record-breaking time.

At a point where several people were riding along talking of the contest Betty pulled up her horse just as Simms came thundering up.

"You just about run away with yourself that time," he said shyly as he settled Sandy down to a walk.

"I just wanted to see if your horse could run—that is, fast enough to catch up," she made excuse.

"Well, how did you enjoy yourself today?" he asked, to make conversation.

"Very much—I certainly did! And I enjoyed your wonderful work, Mr. Simms, and I want to congratulate you—and at the same time thank you."

"Oh, I might have done better if me an' Sandy had some practise on time-ropin'." He belittled his achievements.

Bob was solicitously caring for Betty's mare when Old Man Wells came out to the wagon-yard on the pretense of looking after it. He looked into the mare's stall, saw that she had been attended to and smiled knowingly.

He knew Betty could not have had time to do that and be in the house so soon after he had seen them ride past the hotel together. Simms was just throwing some alfalfa to his own horse, after having cooled out the animal, when Old Man Wells saw him and walked over to where he was.

"How does he feel after his work?" Wells asked, running his hand over the animal's back and down his hocks.

"Oh, he's just as chipper as can be," Simms rejoined.

"What're your plans from now on, son?"

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the old man inquired. "That is, if it's any uh my business in askin' yuh?" remembering the code of the range land against asking too many questions.

"Nothin' to speak of—just trailin' north lookin' for work."

"Well now, you don't have to go hungry fer work; not when I've got so much of it out at the Cross J—that's my ranch—an' I've been lookin' fer some one that'd go out there an' take hold of things. There's fences to fix up a little an' tanks that's got to be looked after, an' wolfin', an' stock——"

"That sounds right good to me, supposin' o'course we can come to terms," Simms cut in.

"Well, now I'll pay you top wages and the choice of horses to ride and do as yuh please with; an' I'll let yuh range any stuff you want to gather up. Think it over an' let me know in the mornin'."

In the hotel, where a crowd was talking over the events of the day, an old-timer greeted Old Man Wells and turned to Simms with a good-natured:

"How's the Lobo? Yuh sure made the purtiest ride I ever saw!"

"Oh, I just about had enough to do to sit that bird without tryin' anything fancy," grinned Simms, and let it go at that.

A COUPLE of days later when Old Man Wells and Simms had come to an agreement and Lobo was lashing a grubstake to his pack-horse preparatory to hitting the trail, Betty came out to watch him put his bed on top of the pack and throw a diamond hitch.

"*Adios!*" she shouted as he swung into the saddle.

From the other end of the street just as he was crossing the railroad tracks Simms turned in his saddle and cast a long searching glance on the trail behind him. He did not expect to see Betty—he had called her that "Betty" morning at breakfast—but in the look was a pleasant memory and he smiled as he shook Sandy into that trail-devouring pace—a running walk.

Simms, like all men of the open country, fell into dreams of what he might find in the new job. He reasoned that it might be the changing-point in his life. He even fell to figuring just how he could start a little herd of his own by buying a few calves and throwing them in with the Wells' stock for ranging. He had saved a few hundred dollars in the Big Bend country, and as soon as he had looked over the outfit and seen just how the land lay he intended to rustle around and see what he could buy.

The Texas sunset had painted the prairie sky-line a myriad of indescribable colors that faded softly into the blazoned trail of a full moon and the meadow-larks had turned the night guard over to the owls when Simms pulled up in front of the home ranch. He let his horses stand by the house and went to the corral that Old Man Wells, with the help of Betty, had described. He found the shed and a feed cache, and soon had the horses watered and fed and started making himself comfortable for the night.

IN HER room at the Lone Star Hotel Betty sat in the growing dusk of twilight and stared unseeingly through her window. She had wanted to be alone—alone with her thoughts—and her thoughts, while she probably would not admit it, were of Bob Simms—Lobo Simms as the country had christened him.

She had not paid much attention to the man until he had leaped his big roan Sandy over the fence and snatched her from the very jaws of death. Nor had she given herself up to thoughts of him while she was setting the tables in her father's hotel or waiting until the stragglers had come trooping in for their meals. But as she sat there and looked out at the prairie that was enveloped in the violet hue of a Summer moon she reviewed his departure.

Betty would not have admitted it to any one, but in his leave-taking she had caught in his eyes a light that she had never seen in the eyes of any of the boys she knew. Betty was young, and romance is ever young. She gave a little sigh—a sigh that held more heart-comfort than trouble.

"Where on earth do yuh suppose Betty has gone?"

It was the voice of her father. He had missed her.

"I'll swan I don't know!" replied the cook, who had been in the Wells's household since Betty's mother had died.

"Well, by George, I'll know—right soon, too!" he snorted.

"Betty!" he shouted up the stairway. "Betty, do you hear me? Where are yuh?"

"Yes, daddy; I'm coming," she answered as she came down the stairs.

"What's wrong with your eyes, girl?

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Yuh ain't been cryin', have yuh?" and he took her in his arms.

"No, daddy dear—it's just—they're just red from the wind the other day," she parried and turned away.

OUT AT the ranch the following day Simms fussed around getting a line on things. But amidst the fussing he found time for thoughts of a certain golden-haired girl—a girl whose smile haunted him during the days that followed. Meanwhile he gathered stock—just riding pasture and starting the cattle toward the home ranch. At the close of his round-up he had tallied nine hundred head of steers, cows and coming yearlings.

At the end of three weeks he had the work pretty well in hand. He knew where all the water-holes were located and whether there was much water for the stock in them; where all the gates in the wire fence were, so that by landmarks he could strike out and ride to any one of them.

Old Man Wells had told him just where the Big Valley stage would drop any mail there might be for the ranch. One morning when he had nothing much to do except wolfing he tied a few traps and bait on a pack-horse and hit trail in that direction. Lobo, who had not received a letter since he'd been there, decided he would drift over that way and have a look just for luck.

"Well, I'll be durned!" he mumbled to himself as he pulled out of the box numerous pamphlets, a couple of letters and a catalog. "A person'd think I was a business man by the way I seem to be gettin' mail."

The one postmarked "Lone Star Hotel," he guessed, was a letter from Mr. Wells. He read it. Just some instructions Wells had to give.

He told Simms not to be a stranger but try to spend Sundays in town with him, as it would give them a chance to talk over ranch affairs. Simms tucked the letter away in his brush coat with the others, wishing there had been some word of Betty and not so much about the stock.

The sun was getting low and he had several miles to ride, and the chores to do when he got back to the ranch—it wouldn't take Dodger long to put the distance behind him, he thought, and drifted out through the sage-brush.

II

MULESHOE had been placed on the map of Texas. The Milburn Stock Company, producing a list of royalty plays that had previously been Broadway favorites, sent ahead their advance agent, who made all the necessary arrangements for an engagement in the town.

Lobo Simms noticed their posters on a fence at the outer edge of town as he rode in to spend his first Sunday with Mr. Wells.

It was tent-show—a dramatic production under canvas, frequently produced this way in out-of-the-way places in the Southern States.

In the hotel a welcome that was much different from any he had been accustomed to awaited him. Old Man Wells peered over his glasses at his form in the doorway.

"Well, by cracky, Lobo, did yuh just hit town? What'd yuh ride in? How's things at the ranch?" he went on to inquire.

Simms took the chair the old man had dragged from a corner and reported on the stock and fences, while he furtively watched for a sight of Betty. When he had finished the old man assigned him to a room.

"Now rattle yer hocks and get washed up fer supper!" he commanded and Lobo obeyed, casting a disappointed look toward the dining-room door.

It has been said, "Once a cowman always a cowman," and Old Man Wells was living up to the maxim. He had once more received a report on his cattle holdings, something he had not had for several years—not since he had bought the Lone Star Hotel and moved into town so that Betty could attend school.

That report was a faint echo of the fast receding past when Old Man Wells—sole survivor of the Wells Brothers Cattle Company—trailed his beef on the hoof to the north; when a loss of three or four hundred head of prime steers in a delivery meant little to the cattle kings. It was the report of his foreman, and the old man straightened his shoulders a bit as he walked beside the former into the dining-room.

"Hello, Mr. Simms," Betty greeted from the farther end as they entered. "How's the world using you?"

"Fair enough, considerin'," Lobo answered, holding Betty's hand longer than was customary.

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Betty did not notice the lingering handshake; or if she did she gave no sign.

"When did you get your mail last?" she asked, looking up at him.

"Yesterday—I guess."

" 'Yesterday, I guess!' Why, Lobo Simms, is that the way you regard a letter written to you?" She shook her head reprovingly.

"Why—er—I got them just at dusk and only stopped to read the one from your dad, then started fer home. Come to think of it there was another letter, but I didn't think to read it——"

"You'd better read that letter," Betty admonished and turned away to her work, leaving Lobo to stare after her blankly.

"See that gent down there?" and Old Man Wells jerked the thumb of his right hand in the direction of a man who occupied another table. "He's one of them show folks that's due in here t'morrer—goin' to be here the hull week, so they say. He's been sorta shinin' up to the girl."

Simms turned to glance across the back of his employer at the man, whose most conspicuous characteristics were a hunger and a thin growth of light-colored hair.

Betty, returning with an order for her father and his hired man, passed the theatrical man. He looked up with a supercilious smile which she did not return—because Betty Wells was a range-bred girl and had much of that range-bred reticence, when it came to the point of smiles. Indeed, Lobo might consider himself an extremely lucky person, and it goes without saying that he did consider himself one of the favored few.

"I'll advance you some of the news in that letter," began Betty, placing the food before him. "There's to be a stock company here all next week and I wrote you about coming in for an evening. I guess from what we hear they have a good show. That man," and she nodded toward the showman, "is with them. He goes ahead and makes all the arrangements and puts up the bills."

"Well, I'm sure glad I hit the trail when I did," Lobo made haste to reply. "I hate like sixty to see any opery troupe get by without my takin' a look at 'em!"

And then without waiting—

"Suppose me and you take it in, Betty?"

Betty's eyes lightened. She glanced at her father and read in his face no outward sign of protest.

"I'd be glad to—Mr. Simms."

"As I was sayin' "—Old Man Wells was continuing a remark regardless of the interruption—"it wouldn't be a bad idee to throw that bunch uh two-year-olds back into the cedar pasture. Water must be gettin' kinda low in the water-holes with all that stuff in there."

"That's just my plan," replied Simms, forcing his thoughts away from Betty. "An' some of them has a touch uh screw-worms, but I'll cut them out from the herd and put 'em down in the hoss corral where I can throw 'em and treat 'em 'fore takin' 'em over there—I oughta have it done by the end of the week."

SUNDAY passed with Old Man Wells and his foreman and sole stockhand checking up the expenses of the ranch and planning on a beef shipment for November.

When Monday rolled around there was little to occupy Simms's mind except to ride Dodger to where the show canvas—a four-pole top with an auditorium arrangement of seats—was being pushed into the air. As in other small towns where shows are infrequent, a crowd had gathered to watch the proceedings.

A few whom he had met at the contest were on hand, and Lobo wearied through the afternoon in the talk that interested them—mostly of range matters.

Toward night he stopped at the general store on his way back to the wagon-yard, bought a couple of sets of cold horse-shoes, some matches and such little articles as he needed and placed them in a burlap sack. This he tied behind his saddle, ready to hit the trail right after the show.

When the show band—composed of actor-bandsmen—blared a concert in front of the hotel to the town populace, many an old-timer took a slant-eyed look at the sky in the north. Mentally they were speculating on the outcome of the weather. The Texas norther had been known to come at almost any hour with a gale from the far north across the sand-patched plains to the Gulf.

Lobo was standing on the porch in front of the hotel, smoking a cigaret, when Betty appeared in the doorway.

"Are you ready?" she timidly asked.

"Most ready little human you ever saw," he grinned.

They walked slowly down the street to the show-ground, where a small surging

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crowd was filling the theater tent. The performance would start shortly—a melodramatic production that had to do with the range and range life. The lighting and stage arrangement were mediocre compared with some good talent in the cast.

Lobo sat there with Betty and watched the performance till the second act, when a flapping of the canvas attracted his attention. It was blowing stronger. Others noticed it and a few got up and left.

"Tie out on the windward side, fellows!" shouted a man hoarsely while a gang of rough-necks tugged at the guy-lines that braced the large canvas. "Goin' to be a blow-down sure's you're alive!"

No sooner had the words been uttered than the wind crept in under the side-wall, where a man had lifted it, and filled the dome of the tent like a balloon. Then a creaking of taut-strained ropes, the cracking of the bellowing top that sounded like a cannon and the entire audience was cramped under the flattened folds of the canvas. The tent-poles fell crashing to the ground across the beacon-lights, which ignited the flapping tent. Panic seized the crowd; men cursed; mothers screamed and gathered crying children to their arms to protect them from flying side-poles.

In the mêlée Betty became separated from Lobo. Above the noise of the mad scramble he called to her, shouting her name against the roar of the wind and the wild cries of the mob; but no response reached his ears. What if she lay in the panic-stricken audience that fought for life amid the crashing of the tent-poles and seat-planks and flapping, roaring canvas?

Then it was all over. He knew no more; a tent-pole had fallen on his head, knocking him unconscious.

People who had not attended the performance came rushing up with lanterns and assisted in guiding those who were enveloped in the ragged folds of the big top to safety. The fire did not last long with the rain of the storm beating down on the show-ruins.

All through the night the men who remained on the scene came across bodies—a few dead and others more dead than alive.

Toward morning they had succeeded in getting the canvas pulled away from the fallen seats and untwisted from the poles and guy-ropes.

With his face buried in the sawdust, his coat blackened with soot from the burning canvas, with an ugly gash furrowing from his right cheek upward to the top of his head, lay Lobo Simms. The men picked him up and gently carried him to the Lone Star Hotel, while some one went for the doctor.

"What on earth's happened to yuh, Simms?" Old Man Wells fearfully asked him as Lobo turned on his side and opened his eyes. "Why, you're all shot to pieces, man!"

Lobo looked into the old cowman's face and inquired about Betty.

"Why, Betty, she come home with that feller Raymond Langley," he replied. "They got——"

Old Man Wells did not finish his sentence. The door to the dining-room opened and Betty and the showman came toward them. She wore a piece of court-plaster above her left eye to cover a small wound caused by a flying tent-stake. Aside from that she seemed fairly well-contented in the company of her escort.

Simms, in open-eyed astonishment, looked at Betty but did not speak. He glared at Raymond Langley, who sensed something more than mere anger in the cold black stare of his rival. Like a guilty coward he dropped his eyes to the floor and sneaked out of the room.

Lobo Simms slowly closed his eyes with a gritting of his teeth which those standing near him believed was merely the intense pain of an injured head. He was put to bed after the doctor had dressed his cuts.

He just wanted to rest a little and then go to the ranch. He had work to do and fretted and fussed about the two-year-olds, whose pasture must be changed.

Betty came to see him only when she brought him a little broth or milk toast. She did not stay long at any time and did not seem to be interested beyond the point of asking how he felt.

The wrecked show-tent finally rose under the efficient leadership of the boss canvasman, and after a two-day lay-off the players were ready to give the remainder of their performances. Betty was at each performance and was very much attended by her escort, the showman.

Many of the townspeople thought Betty was hit by the newcomer. To her he seemed different from any of the men she had met in Muleshoe; nor had she met any

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in Fort Worth that seemed half as nice as he.

After the night shows, when most of the crowd had left, the two would stroll around town and then later take a seat in the plaza on a bench under the cottonwoods, until the streets were empty and bare. More than once Betty Wells had to slip in the back way of the hotel and up to her room, lest her father learn she had been out so late.

LOBO SIMMS was laboriously at work putting in some new slats on the wing of a windmill in a north pasture. He had waited for the first quiet day, when there would be no breeze to make the wing turn and knock him off the fifty-foot structure. When he had finished and had tossed his tools to the ground he sat down and started to roll a smoke. As he did so he saw his horse look up from its grazing.

Simms had learned always to pay strict attention to what an animal was peering at. Pulling his hat down so that the brim shaded his face, he squinted his eyes in a long search of the prairie to the south.

Finally he made out a tiny cloud of dust against a patch of scrub-oak. The cause of the dust he could not see, except that it was traveling a short-cut trail that led to the Cross J.

Climbing down the ladder, he walked over to his horse and got a pair of range-glasses that he carried in a case on his saddle. He adjusted the focus on the object, which immediately grew from a mere speck into a man and horse. Resting the glasses against the branch of a scrub-oak to steady them, he recognized the rider as Old Man Wells.

Hurriedly he gathered up his tools and mounted, intercepting Wells at a pasture gate long before the latter reached the ranch-house.

"Howdy?" he greeted as Old Man Wells swung around a bend in the road.

Wells could not have seen the rider as he skirted the high places, for he reined up so suddenly that Betty's mare sat down on her hocks.

"Where the dickens did yuh come from?" he blurted out without meeting Lobo's frank look of welcome.

"Just been fixin' up that durn whirligig up there on that bench," Lobo explained as they rode along.

"Um-huh," mumbled Old Man Wells and stared absently across the range.

"It was gettin' kinda rickety and without them slats the wheel might not turn quick enough and get it jerked outa there," Simms explained, but the old man did not seem to hear.

At the last wire gate in the pasture Lobo swung down and unfastened it, let his horse inside and waited for his boss, who rode on a few feet, staring straight ahead.

From there over to the ranch-house neither spoke, for Lobo Simms had a way of reading the moods of men. Old Man Wells had something on his mind, and until he was ready to speak Lobo would not force conversation. He wanted to hear about Betty, but he would wait until the silent mood passed.

Old Man Wells sat stooped forward, staring into the fireplace, where cedar and scrub-oak crackled.

"Simms!" he called suddenly.

Lobo was just drying the dish-pan after washing the supper-dishes. He closed the door and, taking paper and tobacco, dragged a chair up to the hearth.

"Simms!"

Old Man Wells looked up at Lobo.

"There's somethin' I want to talk to yuh about. Betty, she's gone an' married that showman, Raymond Langley. I didn't know a thing about it till 'twas all over an' done. Then there was nothin' to do 'cept to make the best of the durn deal.

"She come back home from Fort Worth—that's where he took her—an' ast me to forgive her. Course, I done it. When I ast her where her man was, she said he'd send for her next week.

"Betty kept purty close to the house—'cause every human in Muleshoe know'd about it—an' we waited an' waited, but nary a thing from him—nary a word to his wife; 'cause she was his wife, Simms. Betty showed a ce'tificate, an' she's got the ring, too.

"I guess I sorta mebby overstepped a little, but I jumped to Fort Worth an' had a talk with Nate Hamilton—he used to punch cows fer me—he's detective fer the live-stock 'sociation. Nate, knowin' Betty when she used to make trips up there with her ma an' me, got busy an' said he'd let me know. That's been nigh on five weeks this comin' Friday.

"An' last week I got this from Nate."

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He held out a telegram.

Lobo took the scrap of paper and read:

FORT WORTH, TEXAS.

HENRY WELLS,
LONE STAR HOTEL,
MULESHOE, TEXAS.

Investigation proves your party much wanted man, bigamist, embezzler and all-around crook. Has left the Milburn Stock Company, taking all their funds. NATE HAMILTON.

Simms set his lips in a thin line.

"What does the girl say?" he asked without taking his gaze from the fire.

"She didn't say nothin'. She's gone!"

"Gone! Gone where?"

"Son, she left nigh on a week ago. I can't locate her nowhere."

Old Man Wells got up, walked back to the bed that stood in the corner and threw himself across it, face down.

With a cold cigaret in his fingers, a still colder stare from his black eyes, that seemed to look through the chimney and away beyond, his burly form silhouetted against the fast-dying embers of a midnight fire, Lobo Simms sat and fought his fight.

Old Man Wells got up and took him by the shoulder. Slowly Lobo turned his head toward the old man.

"Son, can't you—do you know where Betty can be? I thought mebby that she's some time er other said somethin' to you that might tell where she would go—if she went anywhere."

"She never told me anything—'ceptin' that she'd like to belong to a show company. That was just 'fore I left for the ranch the first time."

"She can't be with him, for Nate would have gobbled her up an' brought her home to me," said the old man resignedly.

When the gray dawn broke and Lobo had built a fire in the cook-stove, he hustled out to the corral and fed the stock. Old Man Wells had put on the coffee and was mixing up a bannock for breakfast when Simms came back to the house.

"I'll hit the trail in a little while, son—it's a heap longer jog than it used to seem 'fore I moved to town."

Lobo nodded without speaking and Old Man Wells turned away puzzled. He could read most men, but Lobo Simms baffled him that morning. He had thought that Lobo cared for Betty—and yet he rode away hurt and disappointed by the man's indifference.

III

WHEN the Santa Fé west-bound pulled out from Muleshoe one week later Lobo Simms, with certain official credentials in his pocket, placed his suitcase in the seat beside him and looked at a railway map spread out on his knees.

He traced out the different towns—Albuquerque, Flagstaff, Williams and Needles. Then he ran on down the list until his finger stopped at Los Angeles. From what he had heard, that town might offer something for a person hiding out. Betty might choose Los Angeles—it was worth trying.

At a little town where they took on some passengers a man came up and asked to share the seat. Simms made room for him.

"Nice day," commented the passenger.

"This country sure needs water," Lobo observed, peering out of the window at the fast-receding landscape, dotted here and there with small herds of cattle. "Them cows ought to be got to a new range," he criticized.

The stranger, a traveling salesman, kept up his talk about things. He told Simms he was on the last leg of his trip and was now going home after a three months' absence.

"Where d'yuh generally call home?" Lobo smilingly asked.

"Los Angeles," the man answered. "It's some town too, believe me. Garden spot of the world. What way are you heading?" he queried.

"Anywhere, most, they'll let my hat hang, but I'm pointin' my way to Los Angeles right now."

"Going to work for the movies, or just on vacation?" asked the salesman, offering Simms a cigar.

Lobo refused and pulled out his makings.

"Just goin' there, is about all I know so far."

When the train came rumbling down through the sun-kissed orange-groves Simms had just returned from breakfast in the diner. At Pasadena the porter had finished making up his berths and began brushing off his passengers. Simms stood for a whisking and handed the man a small tip.

A long line of cement-constructed sheds, and the wheels came to a screeching, grabbing stop.

"Los Angeles! Change for—" a hurrying trainman shouted.

The bedlam of voices shouting taxis,

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hotel, express and morning papers was almost deafening. He singled out an autobus that bore the name of a certain hotel and piled in along with others.

Now that he was there, he wondered as he shaved and washed himself what his next move would be. Down in the lobby he bought a paper and read the want ads till nearly noon. Two or three he marked with a pencil.

He would call, he told himself, and see what the chances were for a job, because he would have to have a job before many days or else wire Old Man Wells for his back pay. He counted his money and laid aside enough to get back to Muleshoe—that he would not touch under any circumstances.

Looking down the street through the large plate-glass window, he noticed a couple of his kind—cow-punchers if he was any guesser. They seemed to lack that deep tan which comes from days spent in the open, but they walked like waddies—as men of his occupation were called back home—and had the ear-marks of men of the range.

As they entered the door of the hotel they turned in the lobby. They were quick to see the high-heeled boots and Stetson hat Simms wore, and greeted him with an offer to shake hands.

"Cooper's my name," said one.

"Simms—Lobo Simms—is mine."

Cooper introduced the other fellow as Bailey and went on to explain they were working for a big motion-picture concern out in Hollywood. They had been down to the Southern Pacific depot for a couple of scenes and had just got through.

Then they excused themselves on the plea of getting their make-up off. They told him if he would wait they would be down in a little while, and then they climbed into the elevator.

The new hands, as Simms tabbed them, kept their promise. Just before twelve o'clock they returned and invited him to dinner across the street. Simms agreed and walked along with them. He enjoyed the conversation, which was mostly motion-pictures and the ways and means of getting employment and just what the employment meant.

The next morning when Cooper and Bailey were leaving for the studios they invited Lobo to go with them. They told him that they would introduce him to the assistant directors and see if he couldn't get on.

SOME weeks later Simms had been placed in stock with a company doing an eight-part picture. The Great Arts Motion Picture Company advertised it as "The Wolf Man." He had been given the part of heavy, as they term the villain in stage-craft.

His was a part in which he was never seen on the screen except with his face covered with a full beard and masked in true bandit fashion. He had been chosen for the leader of the hold-up gang that committed depredations in a little Arizona community, drew very good money for his acting and had much leisure time to himself.

Days when he was not scheduled for any scenes he spent down-town or at some of the neighboring beaches.

One evening when Broadway was crowded with people from the many theaters, shoppers and workers, all hurrying to catch cars, he sat in a front seat of an up-town car, smoking. In the crowd, just coming out of a department-store, he saw a face.

He nearly upset the man occupying the seat with him in an effort to scramble out. When they got to the next corner several slow-moving women blocked his exit.

He hurried back to the next block and watched every face. But it was gone. It must have been Betty—he couldn't be mistaken. Why, that tousled golden hair he'd know anywhere on earth! What he should have done was to call to her, he thought as he stood on the corner and watched, hoping that she would return.

That night in his room he sat down and tried to reason with himself. He tried to make himself believe that she would not be working in the store. If she were, maybe she had changed her name. If she were not working there. . . .

Lobo Simms grew weary trying to solve the problem. Maybe it would be months before he would see her again. Maybe he would never get a glimpse of the girl. Pinching out the hot end of the cigaret he was smoking and turning out the light, he went to bed a much perplexed man.

Another thing that made Lobo Simms wonder more than once while on location with his company, was a man who had been engaged to do a character part in "The

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Wolf Man"—the part of a retired business man of the East. He had but very little to do in the picture—just appeared a couple of times in every reel, which accounted for the company's seeing but very little of him.

One day while in Griffith Park the new actor came on the set dressed in a frock coat, light trousers and spats, and a silk hat that topped a luxurious growth of black hair—the motion-picture dress of the American gentleman of business. His air when off his guard or not living his part was that of a strutting actor—which caused several of the troupe to comment unfavorably.

Simms had noticed his demeanor. Simms' notice even blended into that something that was reminiscent of other days. Lobo sat with his hatbrim pulled down—a habit of his—and listened to the man as he recounted trials of the road showman.

When the day's work was done the principals returned to the studio in automobiles set aside for their use, and they returned much earlier than the working-crew and extra people—a custom which the directors themselves introduced. Simms did not return with the first auto; he was almost always the last to leave, remaining behind to help the camera crew, which prevented his becoming intimate with others of the company.

One evening Simms reached home early, had washed and shaved and then took a walk in Central Park. He sat down and rested, listening to a band concert.

He was seated on a bench by a path that ran diagonally across the park—a short-cut which many of the working-people used—when he noticed a woman in the crowd—a blonde. She was apathetically listening to the concert.

He arose and walked cautiously toward her. At first she did not notice him—possibly because of his full-grown beard.

"Why, hello, Betty," he said with forced cheerfulness and offered his hand.

She stood for a brief second, then whirled on her heel and ducked through the crowd.

Lobo followed at a safe distance, dodging behind little groups in the crowded park whenever she turned to glance behind her.

At Temple and Hill streets she turned west and walked with much haste. Simms keeping in the shadows, followed.

Into an old rooming-house near the top of the incline Betty turned. Lobo wanted to follow—to call out and tell her that she was breaking her old father's heart. He wanted to take her back to her father as his wife, if that were possible. He stood there long enough to get the address of the house and the name.

When alone in his room shortly afterward, Simms sat down and wrote to her father, describing how he had run across her. He did not mince words about how shabby she had looked and what kind of place she was staying at.

He went so far as to tell her father that Betty must have help, but he could not get to talk to her, let alone give her any money. He said that Betty had evaded him, and the best thing for Wells to do was to jump on the train and come to Los Angeles.

WHEN the motion-picture version of "The Wolf Man" was well along toward the middle of its production, it promised to be the sensation of the cinema world. The Great Arts Motion-Picture Company was already converting the still pictures, taken of the more important scenes, into the standard thirty-six-sheet lithographs which would be placed on all the more prominent bill-boards throughout the country in advance of its initial run.

For Dauman's Theater—America's finest show-house—the company was gathering material to make it a never-to-be-forgotten creation of cinema-dramatic effort. Those who knew let it out to the press that the firm had in store for the public something far away from the trodden path.

By strict orders of the president of the concern the directors were instructed to be careful in staging the remainder of the thrills that led up to the dramatic climax of "The Wolf Man," and the use of doubles was urged whenever there was any stunt that held possibilities of danger to those playing the more important rôles. Finally, the coach—a stage-coach that had the imprint of years of actual service over one of the most dangerous stage-routes in the Southwest—was ordered to be kept intact. The team, of course, could easily be doubled but the coach could not.

Even Lobo Simms had been called into the office and told not to trim his beard. They did not give one single clue to their reason, but simply shoved the matter aside with the statement that he would be drawing salary to carry that beard until he was instructed to cut it off.

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That suited Simms. He could grow whiskers till doomsday if he were paid generously enough for the growing.

"Just like growing wool for the market," he mused to himself and hurried out of the studio to ride down-town with a friend who had a car.

When he reached his room the telephone bell rang. He half-heartedly took the receiver off the hook—perhaps the assistant director wanted to tell him there would be work tonight, he thought.

"Mr. Simms?" asked a voice.

"Yep, that's him," he cheerfully replied when he found the talker was a woman.

"The office speaking," said the voice. "There's a man down here to see you."

"Send him up a-runnin'," he told her and hung up the 'phone, thinking it was some of the boys he had met around the studio.

He was standing before the mirror of his dresser and was wondering just how long he must continue to grow movie whiskers when a rap at the door caused him to call out—

"Come in, durn it!"

When the door swung open noiselessly Old Man Wells stepped over the threshold. Simms was quick to see that Wells was a very much changed man.

"Where is she, son?" Wells asked immediately as he put out his trembling hand.

"I'll show you just as soon as I can get into this coat."

Simms grabbed his hat and jerked it down on his head.

Old Man Wells was so excited that he could hardly wait till Simms turned the key that locked the door.

They walked up Hill Street to Temple and on up to the house where he had seen Betty Wells go inside.

"There's the dump," said Lobo.

The old cowman walked inside and looked about. On the wall he read a sign, "Ring for the Landlady," and by the dim light that hung from the ceiling he found the push-button bell.

"Who is it?" a woman's voice belligerently called from the floor above. "What do you want?"

"I want to see Miss Wells," the old man feebly replied and stood there waiting.

"No sech person in this house!" came from the head of the stairs as the speaker came slowly down the steps.

"A little girl with light hair and blue eyes," he made effort to describe his daughter. "An'——"

"Let's see," she recalled; "it might be the girl in forty-two. Just come up and see fer yourself."

Up through the scantily lighted halls Wells climbed to the third floor and back to where the building was hemmed in by other dilapidated structures. The woman knocked on the door of room forty-two.

"Who is it?" came from the inside.

"That's her, that's her. That's my girl. Betty!" and he brushed the woman aside and rushed into his daughter's arms. "My baby girl!" as he hugged her to him.

Betty knew the moment she saw her father that he had come for no other reason than to take her home. She started in to pack a shabby old suit-case while Old Man Wells paid the woman the five weeks' room-rent that was due.

On the sidewalk they met Lobo Simms. Neither Betty nor her father spoke. But what Betty did do was to walk over to Lobo and put out her hand, and as he gripped it tightly she looked up into his face through tear-dimmed eyes.

Simms went to the depot with them. While they were waiting for the train that would take them back to Texas Old Man Wells called Simms aside and made him an offer to come back and take complete charge of the ranch. He was going to add a few hundred feeders and some cows and would require more than one man to handle it all.

"I'm not quite finished with the durn picture yet," Simms demurred. "That is, I am finished with the actual takin' of the thing but there's somethin' more to be done," and he looked off into space like one in a dream.

"When will yuh be done with it?" Wells parried for a decision.

"About a week, I guess."

"Now, just as soon as yuh get finished hop right on a train an' come back home—I don't know what I'd do without yuh aroun' there runnin' things to suit yerself," replied Old Man Wells heartily.

Betty called to him that the train was ready.

WHEN Director Wharton of the Great Arts Company had cut down his completed picture into a marvel of continuity he arranged his subtitles in

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their proper sequence and then turned his mind to a stage-set that was being built. This stage-set was to provide the background for a scene in which the actors were to appear personally and deliver spoken lines. It was to be cut into the moving picture proper and yet was to form a part of the photoplay.

The set, a masterpiece of scenic artcraft, was an exterior to match the final scene in the photoplay. From where one stood in front of the paint frame, the painting itself, which was two hundred feet long, showed a gradually sloping foot-hill and large rocks that towered into pinnacles and stood out distinctly from the distant snow-capped peaks—a reproduction of a trail that skirted the base of Mt. Clairemont.

The stage-road in the painting was shown tapering off into the cañon by means of huge parallels that inclined upward and were covered with timbering strong enough to carry the stage and its passengers safely.

Director Wharton was enthusiastic over the exterior and as soon as it was dry enough he had it hauled to the Dauman Theater and hung as the back drop of his big scenic. He also ordered the stage-coach and artificial trees and boulders brought there and placed to suit his idea of working out a most effective climax for the close of his picture.

He had several rehearsals of his people in the mechanics of the scene and then he pronounced it all right for the opening.

Lobo Simms, doing the lone bandit in the picture, had acquired a modulated voice—professionally called "a good reader"—through the constant coaching of his director. He was almost certain to steal the show, as the old-time actors saw it.

When he had come down to the theater on the opening night and had seen the mob standing in line as far down the street as the next corner and had gone inside and taken a look through the peep-hole in the curtain he realized just what a wonderful thing the picture had been proclaimed to be. To his way of thinking not all of the crowd outside could possibly get in.

After an overture by the orchestra the theater went dim and the operator flashed on the screen the main title, "The Wolf Man."

The cast of characters came next with his own name—"Lobo Simms, the Lone Bandit"; they had used his real name.

As the picture progressed in the most up-to-date manner of presenting a screen version, with all the beautiful light effects and little particular pieces of business which the producer had inserted to carry the slow-moving story, the audience applauded, then wept, only to burst forth in laughter again as some little touch of comedy broke the tenser moments.

The seventh reel had been turned when a flash from the operator's booth signaled the director. Out in front, as they call the audience, they were gripping their seats. The picture held them spellbound.

The stage-coach was hitched up and the retired business man with his daughter, the leading lady, were inside. The stage was set and had been flooded in a green light.

As the last scene of the picture flashed the coach rambling down the cañon and showed it passing out of picture, the house went dark for the flash of a second while the mirror screen was hoisted rapidly to the fly gallery. Then the green floodlight showed a most beautiful stage-setting of a rocky gorge with the summit topped with snow. The setting held the stage for a slight two minutes to the applause of the expectant audience.

Like a bolt out of a clear sky a baby spot-light in the fly gallery shot a halo of light down on a massive boulder and showed Lobo Simms as the lone bandit, standing there with rifle, his left hand shading his eyes, watching for the late stage as the clattering of hoofs announced its coming.

Dimly the audience saw the stage swing out through a gap in the deep set—"The Late Stage"; so read the subtitle on the screen—and from the way an old-time stage-driver was popping the whip at the leaders one would be ready to believe it.

From behind the big rock in the foreground the outlaw came forth with his mask partly covering his face.

"Hands up!" he thundered to the driver as the four-horse team sat back on their heels and came to a sudden stop.

"Now pile out there, everybody!" he commanded the passengers.

With the help of the orchestra the scene was thrilling—one even forgot it was not a real honest-to-goodness stick-up game. Several of the women in the house fainted.

The business man, who was supposed to be *en route* to his large ranch with his

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daughter, piled out of the stage along with one or two others. The man had just assisted his daughter to the ground and then made an unconscious movement toward his hip pocket, prompted by having heard who the lone bandit really was. That movement was not in the script; nor had the director given him any such business to do in the scene.

Lobo Simms hurriedly pumped a shell into his carbine.

Bang! it echoed.

For the first time since working with the man Simms was sure it was Langley.

The girl felt her father slip through her arms to the floor just as the leading man, playing the part of a deputy sheriff, appeared on the hill above. His part was to come in time to rescue the girl and her father. The deputy stood motionless for a second. Lobo Simms stood leaning forward—all was still.

"Hold it!" whispered the director from off stage, almost loud enough to be audible to the orchestra.

It was a tense moment—a big moment in a big play.

"Curtain!" he called to the man in the wing. The curtain came down much faster than usual.

The audience went wild with enjoyment. They had never seen anything so thrilling and so life-like.

The director touched the man at the curtain and up it went, showing a tableau.

While the producer went in front of the drop to answer a curtain-call and to express his thanks for the hearty approval of his masterpiece, from the dim darkness of the back-stage several policemen came forward.

None had seen them enter, nor had any one seen any particular reason why so many policemen should be back on the stage where it was so crowded. The department usually furnished one officer for each performance in every theater in town.

But there were four of them and a plainclothes-man, and they all came forward prepared for any emergency that might arise. The crowd on the stage stood spellbound as the plainclothes-man went up to where the man had fallen on the stage.

"I guess you got him, Mr. Simms," as he stooped over the man and lifted his hat.

The actor's toupee slipped lop-sided, with the hat lifting it just enough to be noticeable.

"I had to cut down on 'im—he made a play for his hip——"

The detective pulled off the toupee and showed the broad scar furrowed across the now completely bald scalp—the principal point in the identification of the criminal.

"An' that's his complete brand," remarked Simms as the officer traced out the scar with a forefinger. "I wasn't sure of him till his wig slipped."

The detective turned him over, felt the dead man's right hip pocket and pulled out an automatic which had the safety off and was ready for instant use.

"You didn't snuff him too soon," said the policeman as he thumbed the safety into place. "He's cashed in, so there's no use sending him to the hospital. Call the ambulance, O'Brien, and send the body to the morgue."

Lobo drew out of his pocket a sheet of paper with the description of "Smooth Finger" Jones, alias "Denver Dobs," alias Raymond Langley, all-around criminal and bigamist.

Turning to the detective, Simms pointed out the head-line of the description—

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD

The morning papers throughout the country carried the story that Simms had trailed the man across the country and went so far as to tell how he had gone to the chief of police and made arrangements for help.

The papers hinted about a certain cowman's daughter back in Muleshoe who would be waiting for the avenger, who was returning home to make her his wife.

In Muleshoe Old Man Wells, reading the newspaper reports, understood why Lobo Simms had secured credentials from the sheriff before starting out on his man-hunt. He understood the diligent search Lobo Simms had made for his daughter, Betty, and the search that went beyond returning her to her father.

He also understood—at least he thought he did—just why Lobo had said he must finish that picture "The Wolf Man"—the story of cunning revenge; the story of the cold retaliation of the friend and lover.

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Forsythe's Scouts at Beecher Island

by E. A. BRININSTOOL

THE seventeenth of September, 1868, was an important date for the western frontier of the States of Kansas and Nebraska, for on that day was fought a battle between a thousand Cheyenne warriors under Chief Roman Nose and fifty frontier scouts under command of Col. Geo. A. Forsythe, on the Arickaree Fork of the Republican River, seventeen miles south of the present town of Wray, Colorado.

This band of frontiersmen had been sworn into service to assist in punishing the bands of savages which had been raiding the Saline and Solomon River settlements. Forsythe and his men took the trail, which grew hotter as they advanced, and which was augmented by other trails showing that other war-parties had joined the marauders.

On the morning of the seventeenth of September, while the scouts were just about breakfasting at their bivouac on the Arickaree, they were surprized by the sudden appearance of swarms of Cheyenne warriors. Every avenue of escape, seemingly, was cut off, save one, and that was to retreat to a little island in the middle of the stream and put up as desperate a fight as possible. The scouts managed to reach the island without the loss of a man. They tied their horses to the bushes and hastily began scooping out holes in the sand as rifle-pits.

Ere long they were attacked by the combined force of savages, and for nine days were in a state of siege, with nothing to eat but the dead horses lying about them. The Indians charged their white adversaries repeatedly the first day, losing many of their best warriors, including Roman Nose and his leading medicine-man, while the scouts suffered a loss of four or five men killed and over twenty wounded.

Their condition at the end of the first day's fighting was extremely critical. No relief coul be expected unless some of the scouts could steal through the Indian lines and reach Fort Wallace, one hundred and twenty-five miles southeast. Jack Stillwell, a beardless youth of eighteen, but a youngster of undaunted courage and coolness, and Pierre Trudeau, an old experienced plainsman, volunteered. About midnight they started out, and although the Indian cordon drawn around the scouts was so tight that several times the two were nearly detected, they managed to creep unmolested to the nearest hills. Five days later, tattered, haggard and with Trudeau almost a raving maniac from the awful journey, they reached Fort Wallace and a relief party was at once dispatched to Forsythe's perilous position.

However, on the second night, fearful that Stillwell and Trudeau might not reach the fort, two more of the scouts got through the Indian lines and a day or two later met a column of soldiers under command of Col. Carpenter out on a scout. Carpenter's relief party reached Forsythe twenty-four hours in advance of Stillwell and the men from Fort Wallace.

The sufferings of the besieged scouts through the nine days were horrible. Putrid horseflesh was their only means of sustenance, the Indians maintaining too close a watch to permit of any hunting for game. For five days the savages remained in constant force, every attack being met by the remaining scouts with vigor and determination. On the sixth day the Indians, baffled and unable to overcome their plucky adversaries, withdrew, but the scouts dared not venture forth, as there was no means of carrying their wounded and the strong would not desert the weak.

The Battle of Beecher Island has gone down in history as being second only to the famous Wagon Box Fight, in point of valor, sheer pluck and cool-headed fighting. It broke up the huge war-party that had expected to devastate western Kansas and Nebraska and is reckoned as one of the most decisive battles in the history of Indian warfare on the plains.

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WILD BLOOD

CONCLUSION

A FOUR-PART STORY

by GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Savages," "A Dead Man's Tale," etc.

CHAPTER XII

DAVENANT, those days, seemed to try not to be seen with anybody. But natives will babble and they notice everything. So in the dark I had crept upon him and Shaylor and listened, and learned that Davenant had first tried to interest the three German resident traders in an attempt to overpower Williams.

The Germans knew more about Hurricane Williams than Davenant, and they precipitously rejected the plan. Too, they knew how Taulemeito would take it, and they were painfully eager to be friends with the chief. He could make them rich men by simply letting them alone. Or he could ruin them by merely dropping a word that would be carried in all directions so that no man of that place would trade with them.

Then Davenant and Shaylor had turned to the Yankee missionaries and rehearsed the duty they owed the law to assist in having Williams apprehended. So when Malua's boat went—ostensibly for Amoa, though everybody knew it was going to Apia—it carried as one of the crew a native who had promised to spread the report that Williams was at Lelela. A native was likely to promise anything when he received as much money as had been given him.

But would he keep the promise? Would not the keen-eyed Malua notice there was something on the fellow's mind? Malua was too young to trifle with discretions; if he hated a man he killed him.

I frequently lurked near the meeting-place that Davenant and Shaylor used, and though much of what they said was mumbled too low for me to catch it, I had heard Shaylor say the crew would turn on Williams, that the schooner could be stolen out; and Davenant had spoken of the rifles in the cabin, and they were confident of putting together some acceptable plan if relief did not come from Apia.

Dula's name was mentioned. Shaylor complained that she ignored his efforts at courtesy. What Davenant replied I could not hear.

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It was about time that Malua should return, and we were all more or less with eyes to seaward. Some of the natives had gone to the hills to scan the ocean's distant rim. Davenant alone and apart from the village, walked back and forth.

"W'ats he goin' 'o do to 'im?" Hawkins demanded of me, sluggishly throwing an arm at the lone figure. "Williams, I mean."

Hawkins referred to the shot that had reached Williams' back. And Williams by neither sign nor look had indicated that he remembered it. But Williams forgot nothing.

"Can't say, Ben. One of these days he'll probably kill him just like that."

I snapped finger and thumb.

"I can tell what men say Williams once did to another fellow that shot at him from the back and missed. Williams gave him a pistol, one shot, an' didn't take a thing himself. Faced the gun at fifty paces empty-handed. And the fellow didn't miss, but Williams—empty-handed—caught him and broke his neck. Only I don't believe a word of it."

Hawkins cocked his head reflectively, then said:

"Nawp. That's the kind o' stuff these traders b'lieve. But that's a mighty good way 'o kill a man. Make you feel yerself a he-ro. Only Carp Taylor's a —— good shot, an' I can't run."

"Now my i-dee of a nice quiet murder is to go set down on a fellow when he's asleep. Takin' on weight, Red-Top."

He patted his huge belly complacently.

"Takin' on weight. Let me enemies beware. An' say, if we stay at Dakaru long 'nough Carp Taylor 'll show up. Him an' Grahame 're thick."

"Know what he done to me, Red-Top? Had the crew knock me to sleep, 'en Taylor whaled me with a rope. 'F I ever catch that fellow 'sleep he won't have nothin' but a grease-spot for an ep-e-taph. . . . But what's matter with Williams? He looks—you've noticed how he looks?"

I denied any such attentiveness. Hawkins ignored my denial.

"Think it's that woman?" he said with the very self-conscious effort of one pretending to have no interest in his question.

"What woman?"

Hawkins snorted. After meditating a moment he said:

"An' what's matter with her? I know a woman ain't happy 'less she's sufferin', but—say, Red-Top, don't s'pose Williams 'll fall for 'er, do you?"

"He acts funny. Just about like a fellow does when he begins to think maybe the lady is really dyin' for love o' him."

With a bit of spirit I told him he was a fool; that Taulemeito had offered his own sister to Williams, and a man had to have pretty strong objections to women to dare evade marrying a chief's sister. Moreover, as Hawkins could see, a fellow didn't have to be drunk to praise the beauty of Samoan damsels, as was absolutely necessary when he went courting farther west, say over in the Solomons.

"Red-Top," he announced solemnly, having weighed my words, "I'm thinkin' of lookin' out for a Mormon mish-nary—so I c'n be convert-ted."

OUR idyl was ended. Almost from that moment our peace fled. There are old men who somehow dodged death and the treachery of friends, who remember Hurricane Williams or his name; and when they talk of him they talk of what happened in the next few weeks.

Wise, educated men, who have learned what to believe and what not to believe, have come from northern universities and declared Williams to be a sort of mythological figure; that some such man may have lived, but no man did what was credited to him, or could have done it. Preposterous, said the wise men.

I have been told that Williams, being a fierce, remorseless man, would have settled with Davenant promptly; that, having had his feelings changed toward Grahame, he would not have continued to carry toward Dakaru persons on their way to kill him; that, having been warned a ship might be sent against him from Apia, he would have slipped out and waited in hiding; that he must have been pretty much of a fool even to undertake to do the things that—in reply to the inquiries of one South Seas historian, chronicling the exploits of adventurers—the German Naval Bureau, from the depths of its archives, denied his doing.

According to its archives Williams was arrested at Lelela on the same day Hawkins and I sprawled in the generous, wide-reaching shade of a breadfruit-tree and discussed Mormons and things. What they did with

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him after the arrest doesn't appear in the archives.

It does appear, however, that sometime later the gunboat *Friedrich* was disabled and inconvenienced by a hurricane (*sic*). Yet some people say the Germans haven't a sense of humor.

Hawkins and I were roused from our lethargic dialogue by an increasing air of excitement in the village. Some boys had rushed down from the hilly lookout to announce that a ship with smoke streaming and sails set was bearing toward Lelela from the south.

It was useless for Williams to try to escape to sea. He could not get out without being towed by boats. And as it was still morning the steam-driven ship would easily overhaul him before darkness came on.

Our crew suddenly recalled that they were pressed men and began to remember dear drab, dirty Turkee. They had been dragged from their homes and treated like slaves.

As they babbled excitedly petals fell from the chains of flowers about their necks, and some of them puffed heavily from overloaded stomachs. They remembered that they had been badly abused, and now warm, well fed and rested, could not understand why they had put up with such treatment.

Raikes was very loud in his memory of wrong suffered, for as the ship came on there was no doubt as to her German and warlike character.

Some expected Williams to take to the hills. But Hawkins grumbled aside to me—

"'F he does I'il desert 'im, 'cause I simply can't climb trees or things."

"Look about you; look about carefully, Ben," I retorted, "and you probably won't hesitate at a little thing like an eighty-foot palm."

The natives, particularly the youngsters and girls, understood enough fragments of English—and those who understood best repeated what they heard with inaccurate emphasis—to know of what Williams' men were talking. An uncivilized Samoan doesn't shrink much more than a Christian from treachery toward an enemy, but never toward a friend.

Even the faces of the happy, thoughtless little tots wore glowering, savage, miniature frowns. I laid a hand on Hawkins' shoulder, and with the other pointed afar through the trees where a small party of three or four natives with spears in hand were moving away toward the forest, and with them moved the two Yankee missionaries.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed.

I swept my arm farther to the left toward Taulemeito's house, where groups were moving, bristling with war-clubs and spears.

"By ——, we're goin' fight!" he cried incredulously, but with a little of the eagerness of a man who welcomes battle, even one of spears and small arms against cannon.

I told him I did not know what was coming off, but that Williams would undoubtedly give himself up before he would let Taulemeito undertake a hopeless battle.

"And I would sooner think Davenant, over there with the German traders, would shave his beard than Williams 'd give himself up—to Germans!"

The German traders with beards trimmed, faces washed, and in fairly clean white suits, seemed to have delegated themselves as a receiving-committee to welcome the officers of their country. And Davenant had attached himself to them. Shaylor joined the group.

Others of the *Sally Martin*, suddenly feeling the ties of white blood and noticing the bristling pageantry of Lelela, also approached as if to identify themselves with the German party, now in the ascendency.

"Le's go over an' tell 'em to go to ——," said Hawkins, straightening his elephantine shoulders and taking a step forward.

I clutched his arm, telling him that I approved his sentiments but the natives might not understand. It would be better if we showed in some more unmistakable way that we were not white men.

"Hey, you son," Williams roared coaxingly at one of the little boys of not more than a dozen years, who, though their faith was shaken in human nature, still hovered hopefully about me, an old friend, and Hawkins, the most wonderful man they had ever seen.

"Wallamazooki, or whoever you are. Come 'ere."

The boy hesitatingly edged nearer, taking many glances at my face as if wondering if even I—who had spanked him from his creeping days—was going to let him get into some kind of difficulty under pretense of friendship.

Hawkins stooped and earnestly asked the youngster if "you speak 'em hell-fire—— go-to——?"

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The boy was a little bewildered and stared up at me for enlightenment. But the other youngsters had closed in listeningly, and one precocious youth announced, frantically eager:

"I spek 'im, missa (mister). All same mish-i-man. I spek him!"

It was true that missionaries did make a frequent and extended—but no doubt quite proper—use of the words Hawkins had inquired of; and it is equally true that all children learn more readily to swear than to pray. And Hawkins did a very, very wicked thing in sending those young innocents to the beach to deliver certain profane messages.

True, he had intended that only one little boy should walk up and quietly present the compliments of Mr. Dan McGuire and Mr. Ben Hawkins to sundry and all, and express the deep and sincere wish that much evil would befall them, the slightest of which was an eternal bath in a lake of fire. Nothing was to be gained by it, of course, except that ineffable satisfaction of letting people know what you think of them.

But in his innocence Hawkins launched pandemonium. Those imps delivered their messages at the top of their voices. Other imps heard them from afar and came scrambling and screaming.

Hawkins, alarmed at the general demonstration, which had developed into rock-pelting without any lessening of vocal racket, yelled at his imps. They misunderstood his cry of "lay off that" for encouragement; and they declined to listen to me at all.

I was getting really uneasy. If Williams or Taulemeito had wanted a demonstration they could have arranged one without our interference.

Some one of the pestered group made the mistake of returning rocks at the children, and the screaming, eager, wild little rascals joyfully accepted the challenge. They rained words and whatever they could get their hands on; and so many missiles could not miss, though there was some very energetic ducking and dodging going on down at the beach.

And the gunboat was now close at hand, not more than a mile off the outer reefs.

Things looked bad, and presently they looked worse. A group of warriors came running out of the village, spears in their hands, and they were yelling too. Two of the Germans made straight for the water, forgetful of their clean clothes; and the whole party would perhaps have undertaken to swim somewhere had it not soon appeared that the native men were rebuking and silencing the children.

It appeared that Taulemeito was to receive the German captain in all the dignity and pomp his savage court was able to present; and he sent word that a place awaited the traders upon his right hand. Also that he very much desired to have his heart lightened by the presence of the others.

It appeared like an obvious effort to make amends for the insults of the children, if not a somewhat humble attempt to secure at the eleventh hour good grace from the party that could make trouble for him if it complained to the gunboat. But appearances are deceptive in that part of the world.

Taulemeito's official house was a large structure apart from other houses on the border of the *malae*, or green common where all the important sports and councils of the village were held. The walls of the house were mats, and on a function of state important enough to cause the chief to use the house, these were folded up and everybody, from the chiefs and leading men who squatted cross-legged in a semicircle about him to the women and children hovering on the outskirts, was a spectator.

Hawkins and I loitered about among the agitated natives. I knew it would be some time before the ceremony began, for Taulemeito had not yet come from his smaller and private residence near by, where he enjoyed a certainly kingly exclusiveness and privacy—being about the only person in that merry, hospitable village who did.

Williams sent for me, and when I reached him his message was brief and surprizing.

"Watch Davenant. If need be, kill him."

A dozen questions tried to leap out at once, but all I could say was—

"What the devil's up?"

Hawkins must have received instructions of some kind, too, for I saw him amid the frankly hostile glances of both the natives and the whites edge in close to the three traders; and being unable to sit cross-legged he half-sprawled on his stomach.

Davenant had the faculty of appearing to be apart even when in the midst of a group. Shaylor, talking very loud and

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rather impudently, was on his left hand.

Perhaps they thought I scrouged in near them to overhear. Shaylor ignored me with large unconcern, but Davenant gave me a long steady stare and smiled; that is, showed his long rows of exceedingly white and apparently sharp teeth.

I noticed Father Rinieri and Dula coming to places evidently made for them some distance removed from the immediate semicircles, facing the seat Taulemeito would occupy, but much nearer than any other woman had. Her eyes searched restlessly for Williams, and when she saw him, squatting motionlessly, eyes on the ground, she looked at him almost steadily.

THE *Friedrich* had hove-to beyond the outer reefs. By the set of her sails and the smoke curling from her funnel it was apparent that she did not intend to spend much time at Lelela. Well, no one wanted her.

Two boats came ashore with officers and armed sailors. They were businesslike. Also perhaps a little apprehensive at the sight of the welcome arranged for them. They were greeted at the beach by a party headed by the *tulafale*, the chief's spokesman, orator, prime minister, or what-you-will. The symbol of his rank is a long staff —symbolic perhaps of the length of his tongue.

Captain Lumholtz was an excited little man not greatly unlike a miniature copy of Hawkins, and actually aroused the admiration of the natives by his large display of gilt and braid. He carried a sword longer than his own legs.

He had with him the treacherous member of Malua's crew, and was intent on using him as an interpreter. In broken English —for the miserable Senva had sailed on a whaler and knew more English than was good for him—Captain Lumholtz, through Senva, demanded Hurricane Williams at once and forthwith. There would be no trifling, no argument, no powwow. And the puffy captain swept a pudgy arm toward his stolid sailors.

He was persuaded, however, to come up and address himself to the chief. Senva was thoroughly frightened, for certain remarks were made to him that he did not translate.

Now it happened that Taulemeito, who was brave and headstrong and seemed to think there was some kind of magic in Williams, had stubbornly determined to assert his rights against the whole of Germany if need be. He, of course, did not begin to appreciate the resources of a European nation. He had plenty of rifles and powder. He had Williams at hand to lead the fight. Williams probably would have readily taken to the hills. It would not have been the first time he had to sacrifice everything he had in order to escape.

But Taulemeito swore that he would declare war on the gunboat. At most it did not have more than eighty men on board. It was a German gunboat. German gunboats didn't dare come into the harbor.

Now a British gunboat would have been different. . . On such trivialities does colonial prestige hang.

There was nothing incongruous in Taulemeito's being polite when he meant war. For though it was no doubt at Williams' subtle suggestion that the traders and crew were rescued from the tormenting children and invited to seats of honor, yet in native wars the tribes were incredibly polite before a battle, exchanging gifts and gracious speeches, often camping the night out within voice-call without setting up guards.

Captain Lumholtz, at once nervous and pompous, with two young officers scarcely less bedecked in wrinkled full dress, having left the armed sailors on the outskirts—where they were at once overwhelmed with coconuts, fruit and various delicacies by natives utterly incapable of not being generous—came stepping carefully through the squatting circle. With difficulty he eased himself down into as nearly a cross-legged position as was possible for him.

As he appeared, one of the German traders had exuberantly begun to raise his voice in some overjoyed welcome. But Hawkins had growled.

He more than growled, for he lifted a war-club borrowed from a native near by. Taulemeito too with slow dignity had turned his head and crushed the German with a long, deliberate glance.

Captain Lumholtz, being new to the South Seas, not being familiar with native ceremony, and perhaps finding his cramped legs unbearable, did not appreciate fully the Kava— *Ava*; for the Samoans have no "*k*"—ceremony, where girls, a little to one side of the chief and under the supervision

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of the *tulafale*, were chewing the root, at the same time swaying their bodies rhythmically, gracefully. Nothing of importance takes place without Kava being served, though the perliminary may be a little monotonous to one sitting painfully on unaccustomed legs.

Captain Lumholtz decided that it devolved upon him to begin, and he addressed Senva, bidding him translate his demand for Hurricane Williams. The captain had scanned all the white men he saw, and he had not perceived Williams at all. Senva, dreadfully frightened, began. But he was cut short by the irate Taulemeito.

"Who art thou, born of a pig, to speak to my face in the presence of chiefs and friends? Tell him who carries his long knife across his belly lest it trip his feet, that Taulemeito will cut thy head from thy shoulders and in his presence, here!"

Two seconds of startled silence followed. Then Williams sprang to his feet, shouting at Captain Lumholtz.

"There," he cried, an arm like an outthrust sword leveled at Shaylor, "is the man you want!"

It was as if he had suddenly become obsessed by a grim sense of humor. It was incredible. I felt my bones turn to jelly, and a shiver of amazement went through me. For seconds every one was jarred speechless; the psychic breath, so to speak, knocked out of them.

Captain Lumholtz jerked his head nervously, eagerly, toward Shaylor, who had opened his mouth and half-lifted his hands stupidly. I heard Hawkins' low-voiced rumbling threat to the men beside him, commanding silence—with the club.

I suppose a hubbub would have broken out at the next instant if Williams had not begun to speak. He said probably fifty words and he said them rapidly, in Samoan and to Senva.

I never knew a man who had such convincing, commanding force to his words. Probably it was because he always really did mean what he said and backed it up with every ounce of his fierce strength. Anyway in two swift sentences he told Senva to identify Shaylor as Hurricane Williams or he, Senva, would die then and there.

Impressions swarmed in upon me to be remembered later. I was scarcely conscious of seeing or noticing anything at the time. But I did see the stern puzzlement on the face of Taulemeito relax, a smile come and go. He understood what Williams was doing.

Williams' eyes swept along the row of white men, along the traders, along the crew, ignored Shaylor and rested on Davenant for a fraction of a second. Williams' look was a warning, cold and dangerous.

Shaylor, stammering, inarticulate, was blurting a livid, profane denial. I felt a movement from Davenant who, cool, determined, was about to get to his feet. I caught him by the trousers band and jerked him down and he felt the muzzle of a revolver at the small of his back.

Under Williams' eyes, following his orders, I always lost my indecision and seemed caught up, supported, by some strong impulse. Davenant turned his head, a glitter of fright for once in his eyes, and he did not smile.

"There are my crew," said Williams, cutting through Shaylor's voice and flinging a gesture toward the surprized, palpitating men of the *Sally Martin*. "Ask them!"

That was too much for even Shaylor. He gaped stupidly at the men, but as with one accord they avoided his eyes.

"Do you mean—" he began.

"There is my log," said Williams, lifting a book and holding it in readiness for Captain Lumholtz's inspection. "I pulled this man from a wreck at sea. He tried to capture my ship—did capture her. I was shot—in the back."

One of the German traders gasped—

"*Mein Gott!*"

Shaylor was on his feet, cursing wildly and shaking his arms furiously—and with every word and every move showing himself to be such a man as Captain Lumholtz and his officers must have imagined the burly brute Williams to be.

Williams' voice, sharp, not high-pitched, came clear and distinct through Shaylor's agitated protests. He was brief, but what he said seemed to clinch his position: He declared that fortunately he also had known Taulemeito for many years and they were friends, so he and his crew had been well treated. But he believed Taulemeito would be willing to give up "that man Williams" (as he called Shaylor) if Captain Lumholtz insisted.

Captain Lumholtz had been glancing through the log. Whether or not he could

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read English with even as much facility as he spoke it is doubtful; but he was apparently satisfied. He closed the book and dropped it to the ground beside him.

"Him Hu'lly Willims!" Senva eagerly volunteered, pointing at Shaylor.

Senva cried it frantically. Whether he had caught Williams' eyes or his chief's I do not know.

There was not a native even to the jostling, breathless outskirts of the throng that did not understand what was being done; and they were excited, inwardly bursting with glee that the hateful gunboat men were being hoodwinked. They did not appreciate that Williams was taking a rash chance to save the village from vengeance.

He had planned it evidently from the time he realized how stubbornly Taulemeito was determined on fighting. Williams had had the two Yankee missionaries removed from the village because he knew that they could not, would not, be intimidated into silence. There is something about even a Yankee missionary that commands respect when it comes to personal courage.

"I coom dedermined to half dot man," said Captain Lumboltz, blinking wickedly at Shaylor. "Und by —— I haf 'im! He iss a byrate, a —— pyrate. I take 'im to Ghermany und dey hang 'im dere!"

The words were much more chilling, menacing, than they appear repeated in broken dialect; and Captain Lumholtz in spite of pudginess was evidently a man of firmness.

Words passed between Taulemeito and Williams, and Williams translated that the chief was ready to give Shaylor up at once. Shaylor acted like a man already on the gallows, almost exhausted with terror. He appealed to the crew. He implored Davenant. Williams crossed to him, and the very glare of Williams' eyes seemed to silence the miserable fellow.

The people made way for the German sailors, who marched in, took possession of Shaylor and with abrupt, military quickness marched off again.

Shaylor was a broken man. Even I felt a sudden sympathy for him, though I knew he was far more safe than if he remained within striking distance of Williams.

Williams seldom gave warning if he had cause for a man to die. But an appeal, an explanation to an American consul in any port would start investigation to get him off free; though Shaylor probably would not be able to make such an appeal until he had been carried clear to Germany.

Captain Lumholtz, though stiffened with pride and pleasure, was exceedingly agreeable. He bowed clatteringly over the hand of Taulemeito and pledged the eternal friendship of Germany. He shook the hand of Hurricane Williams, thanked him for his service, wished him success and promised full punishment upon the terrible pirate—the "byrate" that certainly looked the part.

And when he was gone three portly German traders had tears rolling down their cheeks. Hawkins had threatened to brain the first who opened his mouth, so they had not even greeted the glittering representative of their nation, the protector of their interests. However, they were solaced somewhat by certain concessions which Taulemeito in a cheerful mood extended to their trading.

Hawkins in speaking of the incident remarked:

"I never had a fist on one o' them warbillies b'fore. Wonde'ful how the heft of 'em just makes you want 'o hit somebody. No wonder them Dutches kept their hatches battened down."

After a pause, reflective, studious, he said earnestly—

"Red-Top, it's funny, but I don't know whether I want 'o laugh or cuss or say a prayer."

And I laughed nervously.

THERE was merriment in Lelela that night. Samoans have a high sense of humor; most of their conversation is teasing, fun-making, ridicule and jokes. And they were wild with gaiety. There was no hope, no expectation of keeping the joke on the gunboat a secret; but the morrow is always far off. Besides there was the good chance that the imposition would not be discovered until the prisoner had been taken clear to Germany—if he were not hanged on a yard-arm first.

Strange that Lumholtz had not mentioned the reward his country offered. Perhaps it had slipped his mind. Perhaps he was grateful that no one else mentioned it, so there would not be the inconvenience of having to share, to divide it.

I went to Williams, who sat moodily alone in Taulemeito's private house.

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"The devil loves his own," I said. "But Hawkins forgot an' slipped a prayer toward Heaven. Maybe that's what pulled us through. But——"

He glanced at me; and his eyes were silencing. Perhaps he was relieved to see that I was not drunk. I do not know. He seldom showed that he cared one way or the other.

For a long time there was silence; or at least it seemed a long time to me. Then he said, without looking at me, and in short quick-flung sentences, that he would give a thousand pounds if he could get a British or American consul to come into Lelela and raise his flag.

Taulemeito would be outraged, but it was a choice of evils. The Germans eventually would make the village pay for that day's work—unless a British or American flag were there.

"The Germans will make them pay, make them pay," he repeated.

Then jerking his head up, he glared at me, his body contracted as if about to leap, and involuntarily I shrank. Slowly, tensely, taking an oath upon himself, he said—

"So help me God, I'll wreck the ship that shells this village if I have to swim half the ocean to get her, and then go down with her!"

Williams had never said anything like that before, had never so challenged the impossible. The fleeting fear that he *was* mad, as some men declared, raced across my brain and vanished.

No. No madness there; only the daring and determination to have vengeance on whomever harmed his friends.

Silence again, and a long pause. I started to slip away. I had no place to go, nothing to do; for oddly enough I did not feel like joining in the tumultuous celebration of the village. Hawkins was in the midst of glory; but the other white men, strangely quiet—uninvited for one thing—sat apart, talking low-voiced among themselves, wondering how and why they had been silenced, wondering that Williams had known—much less dared such a thing—that they would sit like mummies, fear-embalmed.

Now the natives were unfriendly toward them. They felt stranded and in danger. Nothing was left them but some desperate action, or—so they thought—the well-nigh equally desperate inaction.

Raikes had urged them to appoint him as the leader of a committee to visit Williams and find out what was likely to happen to them. I wondered what they were talking of by this time, and I tried to slip from Williams' presence.

With a gesture he kept me seated. It seemed a long, long time before he said anything. Then he looked up and spoke as if he had suddenly remembered what he wanted to say. But I had doubts.

He remarked that I and Father Rinieri were friends; and could I imagine what the priest wanted to see him about——

He broke off.

Almost, if not quite, involuntarily I finished his sentence:

"—about her?"

"Why?"

The word was sharp, mandatory.

A little uneasily, but with something reckless vaguely stirring me, I said—

"Skipper, I'm likely to tell you the truth—then have to lie like the devil to make you think I was joking."

By his hard gaze he demanded that I go on.

I made the jump. I simply closed my eyes and flung my answer to him.

"Skipper, women go to priests to tell 'em the names of the men they hate, and why. They can't tell 'em why they love. Nobody knows that. But the other reason they go is to tell 'em who!"

Two hours later Williams was still in the house of the priest, across from him at the little table, with the yellow flame of the lamp burning between them. To me, waiting impatiently in the darkness, it seemed that much time went by when neither spoke, and even then I could not hear all that I wished to hear.

CHAPTER XIII

"THAT," I said to Hawkins in a mood to throw him overboard, "is Dakaru."

"That," he repeated with complacent stubbornness, taking his pipe in one hand and extending the other requestfully, "ain't nothin'. Just a cloud or somethin'."

We had the morning watch. The sun was peeping up and the sails were full.

"Think those boys there in the bow don't know land when they see it?"

I flung an indignant gesture at the Samoans who were staring at the faint low

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bluish mist-like form that touched the sea where sky and water met.

"Awright," he rumbled. "Give me that pouch. It's Dakaru." And having the pouch he added—

"—if it ain't somethin' else!"

But it was Dakaru, and with ten Samoans headed by Malua and a half-dozen white men—who rather imagined they would have something dreadful done to them any hour—with Dula and Davenant on board too, we were nearly at the long voyage's end.

WE HAD left Lelela two days after Captain Lumholtz proudly went his way with his cherished prisoner.

In those two days a few things perhaps worth mentioning had happened.

Malua had returned from Apia, empty-handed and furious.

At the feet of Taulemeito, before whom he poured out his story, he had brained the miserable Senva. And again at Williams' request a party of men hurried the Yankee missionaries off to the hills. Malua swore to club them to death. They had inspired Senva to treachery.

The American engineer at Apia, undoubtedly frightened and possibly truthful also, had said it was impossible to furnish dynamite. He had heard the report Senva gave out even before Malua learned it had been given out; and he conspired to hold Malua at Apia so he could not get away and give warning before the *Friedrich* had started.

He and his German employers might have held a large healthy conger eel much more easily than Malua, when that young chief discovered what was in the air. He did not even appreciate the joke that had been played on the gunboat. His temper was up.

And what had happened the night before he arrived home did not lessen his resentment against white men, all white men, who came overrunning the islands of his people, laying out plantations, feeding the natives rum and gewgaws, defiling the women, spreading disease and thrusting Bibles with the threat of hell-fire into their faces.

Strangely enough he did not think of Williams as a white man; but even face to face with the immobile serenity of Father Rinieri he had, with surprizing bitterness for a Samoan, loosened his anger.

THAT night when I had waited so long outside of Father Rinieri's house I had not been eavesdropping. Of course I did not thrust my fingers into my ears or anything of the kind. But the little cockney, who had a very great admiration for Hawkins, had searched him out and told him that Raikes and Davenant were cooking up some deviltry; and that he, Cockney George, wasn't "hidiot henough to try to tyke the wind hout hof 'Urricane Wylliams' syles."

No sir. George didn't have any love for Hurricane Williams. But he would be "bloomin' well blasted" if he didn't have too much sense to try to come anything over that fellow.

So I waited to give Williams what I had heard from Hawkins. At least that was the excuse I had given myself for remaining so long near Father Rinieri's door. I knew the crew felt miserable and in a mood to think they ought to do something, anything; but I really did not suppose that they would try to seize the ship.

What they expected to do with it after they got her I don't know. They had nothing to do but go on board. She was ready to sail—only she would have to be towed out, and by not less than a half-dozen boatfuls of strong rowers.

But Davenant, it appeared, had told them of the rifles. Raikes, who alone knew something of ships, had talked foolish and gestured aside the difficulties.

Anyway they went on board and broke out the rifles.

Davenant had tried to get Dula to go on board too. What she told him I do not know. But one of the native girls who was present told me, though she understood scarcely a word of English, that the hairy-faced man had been very angry and tried to talk loud; and that Dula had been quiet and smiled. It was the native girl who had screamed when he raised his hand to strike her. And he went away.

Perhaps she had told Davenant much the same that I overheard Father Rinieri tell to Williams. I did not hear much, though my ears grew about two inches from the strain; but I did catch the fact that Dula had withheld nothing—nothing—from Father Rinieri, and that she was more relieved, more at ease with herself, than had ever seemed possible to her. But Father Rinieri was not himself yet at ease over her.

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However, that has nothing to do with the attempt to steal the *Sally Martin*. By the time I told Williams what was planned, the plan had been accomplished.

We did not know it then. The maneuver had been carried out with an effort at secrecy—only there is no such thing in a Samoan village. We knew it presently, for the village was in a hubbub.

But Williams said nothing. Not a word. I would not believe that myself if I had not stood by him, tagged after him, followed him, in eager expectancy to hear him snap a few words of orders, then go toward the beach and set out with boats for the ship. It seemed as if all the village had the same expectancy.

Williams went to the house Taulemeito had set apart for him. I followed. So did the village. The village squatted on the grass and in the shadows. I loitered in the doorway.

At last I demanded—

"Skipper, what you going to do about it?"

He stirred himself from moody reflections, but they had obviously not been on the *Sally Martin*, for he said bruskly, as if unwillingly recalled to something of scant importance:

"Do about it? Go aboard in the morning and put those men to work."

And he did.

In the most matter-of-fact way, shortly after dawn, he was rowed out to the ship. Hawkins and I were with him in the same boat. The rail bristled with rifles menacingly laid across it.

Raikes, yelling at the top of his voice, warned us off. Davenant, cool, even a little polite, warned us off.

"Red-Top," said Hawkins, pretending to be—and perhaps not wholly pretending—a little anxious, "how 'n —— 's anybody goin' miss me? If I 's skinny like you——"

He broke off.

Raikes was crying that another stroke of the paddles would bring a volley.

The natives let the paddles trail and twisted anxious faces toward Williams.

He told them to row on.

Hawkins took a deep breath like a man about to plunge into cold water.

"Fire!" commanded the high, chill voice of Davenant.

We could see the expression of amazement on the faces above the rail. Not a rifle went off. Some of the men looked at their guns as if they had bewitched things in their hands, and peered, stupefied, at the unexploded shells.

I laughed, a bit hysterical perhaps, but none the less in merriment. I had forgotten that Williams, a capable gunsmith, who had often had rifles stolen from him, had removed the firing-pins. No wonder he cared very little how many men had gone on board and armed themselves.

The crew was flabbergasted, literally. They did not understand it. It savored of the devil, of real black wizardry.

What followed from Williams may have seemed to them more devilish but without any wizardry in it. Whether what Williams soon proceeded to do was actually diabolical or was even stinted, inadequate justice, I do not know. No other man would have done it, at least in just the way that he did.

He shouted for the sea-ladder to be thrown over, and he was up it in a bound. The crew were a little awed and somewhat frightened.

He seemed to ignore their recent pitiable effort at mutiny. He turned his back on this man and that carelessly. Some of them still held rifles in their hands and could have clubbed him. But when he said to help Hawkins up they jumped to obey.

The Samoans scrambled on deck.

Upon the poop Davenant stood, absolutely trembling—no doubt with nervousness and anger and disappointment.

Williams looked up at him and snapped—

"Come here!"

Every face was upturned toward Davenant, waiting for what he would do—summonsed like that.

"You will please speak to me as to a gentleman!" he said.

His voice got away from him though. It was shriller than I had ever heard it. Davenant was shaken through and through.

Williams scarcely moved except to jerk his head to one side, and a score of words, not so many perhaps, crackled from his mouth. He spoke to the Samoans. I caught each word and weakly grasped at Hawkins and muttered, "My ——!" as the Samoans streaked aft.

Davenant saw them coming and was alarmed. He backed away, but seemed incredulous that they would presume to lay hands on him. They not only did lay hands on him, but they grasped him and

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roughly but not abusively hurried him down the ladder and into the waist.

He struggled and cried out, mad with a goaded sense of indignity—if not too with fear. He was no longer the chill, poised, enigmatic figure, hiding Sicilian passions under the shell of an Englishman. He raged venomously. Nothing was left him of dignity, of prestige—nothing was left him but flesh to feel pain.

When Williams sent the natives aft he had told them to bring Davenant there and bind him to the mast, arms encircling it.

And they did.

They stripped his coat from him, thrust him against the mainmast, pulled his arms around, tied each wrist, then brought each of the lines clear around both the mast and his body. They tied his legs vice-like too. He was helpless as if on a rack.

Williams took the long knife from his belt, cut an end from a half-inch rope and casually flicked the four feet of length as if testing it.

We were a group of amazed, even horrified, men. In our minds, at least, Davenant was the owner of the ship. But more than that he was a peer of England, a lord, the son and heir of a marquis.

But all that Williams said was, "Stand back," and we gave way. He tossed the line into the air and brought it down on Davenant's shoulder.

The man screamed. It was not pain. It was outrage. The blow did not break the skin of his back, but it cut through his heart.

INCREDIBLE as it is to say so, there was not a sign of passion on Williams' face or in his manner. He was tense; the muscles of his neck stood out like large cords, and his eyes had the force of physical strength. But he was always tense, always strained, always seemingly at the point of fury.

Blow after blow came down. They stung, but he was not putting his weight to them. He was not beating the man's flesh so much as the man's spirit.

Davenant's cries were more like those of a beast than of a man. His black beard was flecked with foam; his mouth white with it.

And there was no way of knowing whether Williams was paying punishment for the shot into his back as he slept, or for the late, abortive, senseless attempt to steal the ship—or for something else that had aroused his terrible sense of vengeance. There had been the long, patient devoted hours that Dula put in by his bed; and there had been the long hours that he sat across from Father Rinieri, that night before when I waited in the shadows.

There he had heard her story from the time the Sicilian countess came as a bride to England—the whole story, with its tragedies and bitternesses, told with the solemn, dramatic, yet compassionate words of an old, wise man who knew the hearts of men and of women. As a priest, Father Rinieri had heard what she would not, could not, have told to another; but, having told, she gave permission, if she had not indeed made the request, that her story be given to Hurricane Williams.

Why a woman, when she loves, feels, and scarcely can ever resist, the urge to cast herself humbly, confessionally—whatever her disgrace—at the feet of the man, is something belonging to the inscrutable secrets of God Himself. It seemed she had chosen to make her confession vicariously.

And perhaps those blows that fell on Davenant's back were the expression of what Williams felt and thought of the cruel, evil way in which Davenant had not only kept her fermented with hate against her father—kissing the knife with which she was to kill him—but had deliberately, malevolently, caused her to learn and endure other, and worse things.

He, a grown man when she was a child. He, the brother of her mother. But perhaps, too, there was something even more that surged within Williams—some response, some answer that would not be stilled, to her bold, unashamed love for him.

But that is all conjecture, no better than shooting at a target hidden from view. And I maunder on like an old woman at gossip. The fact is that Williams beat with a rope-end the body of Sir Francis Davenant for three or four minutes; then with two strokes of his knife cut him loose.

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you!" the man shrieked.

His arms were upraised, his fingers talon-like. The rope that had bound him still dangled from his wrists. He was weak from fury that had in frantic impotence burned up his own strength.

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He was not like a madman. For the time he was one. All the Sicilian hate and mania for revenge of which he was capable was wildly flaunted at Williams. Davenant was simply unrecognizable as the poised, chill, aloof man with the carefully combed black beard and disturbing, cynical white smile.

There was no plumbing Williams' mind. At least I could not. So, whether he really felt that whatever Davenant could threaten or do was nothing to notice, or whether his appearance of not even hearing or seeing Davenant was deliberately assumed to make the man more sufferingly mad, is for those who feel they understand to guess at.

He turned from Davenant and spoke to the crew. It was their turn. And they jumped to the dirty, hard work he ordered, jumped for slush-pots and tar-buckets.

They moved with a will. One might have thought there was a big money-prize dangling before their fingers.

Davenant saw his chance. He swooped at the deck, snatched a rifle and swung it. I shouted; Hawkins shouted. The Samoans nearest him lurched forward—too late.

But Williams did not carry his life in his hand without knowing pretty well what went on behind him. I believe that he sensed that coming blow through some faculty developed by years of strain and watchfulness. I believe that, only because I can't believe that he saw it.

Anyway he expected it, and all the while must have been poised to wheel. He did. His hand shot out and up, caught the descending gun at the barrel, wrenched it from Davenant's grip, flung it to the deck—and he simply turned his back again.

Davenant just looked at him, just stared in a kind of stupid daze; and then—no doubt unconsciously—he made the sign of the cross on his breast. Silently he went aft. He went to his room. He has not been seen out of it since.

THE Samoans that had come on board with Williams remained. White men were under native eyes. They became the crew. Not those men, or not all of them; but others came to take their place.

Malua came with a half-dozen eager to follow Williams over the world. Why? He would lead them into trouble. He told, and made them understand, hemp or at least prison awaited them if he should be caught.

They came eagerly. Not for his money or trade or for anything that could be bought with money. Why? I do not know; and I have often wondered.

Perhaps it is because men, no matter what their color, follow the intrepid ones. Perhaps it was because Williams never broke a promise to them. He never broke his promise to any man. A simple way to get rid of Williams from the high seas would have been through getting him to agree to go to Sydney and stick his head through the noose. He would have gone. Indeed, he would have gone.

He made lots of promises and he kept all. He went to Sydney once to keep a promise with a brute of an old captain—and stole that skipper's brig under the eyes of the forts. And he wrecked it, as he promised he would if that thief did not split fairly on the cargo of very fine shell that Williams had gathered but could not take into port himself.

Too, he had promised to take Davenant and the woman to Dakaru; and he was taking them.

I do not think that Dula wanted to go except with the ship. I mean that I imagined she did not particularly care whether the ship went to Dakaru or Denmark; but wherever it went she wanted to go.

I guessed that she was not eager to go to Dakaru because Father Rinieri came on board with her and the native woman, Laulai; and he would not have come on board to give his parting blessing unless he knew that her first urge for going to Dakaru had vanished. He remained with us until the ship was towed to the outer reefs; then a boat came alongside for him.

Dula—I was watching closely—held his hand for seconds at parting. Her face had a strange mildness that turned into a smile as she said good-by. What they said I do not know, for their talk was in a language of which I understood nothing.

I helped him down the poop ladder. He walked very slowly.

"Father," I said, "if you don't think it'll make the Lord angry with you, you might mention my name to Him. You know, I'm not bad as He must think, since He only hears o' me from other missionaries."

He looked at me questioningly, quietly. I was perhaps irreverent, but I was not insincere.

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"I've been to Dakaru before. And, father, the crust 'tween it and hell's mighty thin!"

And he answered with something I have often thought on, and wondered at his understanding of men, of wicked men like myself.

"Dan, Dan," he smiled, "I'm afraid I'll be of most service to you twenty years from now—when you remember me."

A prophetic benediction. I never saw him again, but the memory of him and his wise goodness has never left me.

Williams was waiting to help him down the sea-ladder, and in parting Father Rinieri said something to him that I did not understand, and I do not think I have ever understood.

"Captain Williams, I shall always consider it an honor to have known you."

And I had enough already to think on without cudgeling my head half the night wondering what Father Rinieri could have meant by that. He had seen Williams several times during the past years and hardly spoken with him.

Perhaps Williams, too, had made a confessional across that lamp-lit table; or perhaps that wise old priest had looked deep through Williams' silence and understood the man as no one else did. I do not know. There are so many things I don't know, and for one as curious as I am it is often fretful and increases sleeplessness.

One thing was clear however: Father Rinieri would not have considered it an honor a week before to have known Williams.

DULA had Laulai, a Samoan woman, as a companion. Laulai could speak a little English. When a girl she had married an Englishman and lived with him for ten years. He had made money in trade and gone back home to spend it on white women. She never saw him again.

It was Laulai who told me with that free sense of criticism that women have—particularly native women after they have learned impudence from white husbands—that she did not think Williams was such a fine man. He had sent Red Shaylor away for Germans to hang him. Williams should have killed him outright.

Had anybody annoyed the wives of Taulemeito and lived? Could any man grab a woman in the shadows that loved Malua, and not die? Williams was a great *alii*, brother of the chief; but he was no *tausea*, no protector.

Laulai was taking it for granted that I and every one else knew of what she was talking. Apparently she was talking of many things, or at least two or three.

I was a fool, she said. Samoan ladies are outspoken. Did I not know that the beautiful woman had been fearful of the *lima toto* man—the red, the bloody-handed Shaylor? Did I not know that there had been cause? She was afraid too of the black-haired man.

Why hadn't Williams settled with the one and with the other, too? Gave one to the Germans. Whipped the other with a little string. Bah! She, Laulai, had heard that he was a man.

I recalled how Dula had on the ship seemed to sense the wisdom of avoiding Red Shaylor, even though the alternative was to make a companion of me; and how he had blustered before her and looked at her from a distance. Word by word I pried from Laulai that Shaylor had been objectionable in the village.

Though she was sworn to secrecy, the oath was not what made it so difficult to get information out of her. Woman-like, she wanted to express her opinion instead of telling facts.

It had got so that Dula could not walk out in the evening without Shaylor waylaying her. Once he had grabbed her, perhaps thinking that Dula was alone, when she had walked on from two or three of the girls who stopped to gossip with somebody. Dula had made the girls promise to say nothing about it, and by some miracle they seemed to have done so.

"Well," I reflected, "Red Shaylor is gone. Probably the Fates are patching up the hole that Williams tore in their design when the *Roanoke* went down. Or maybe they really didn't want him to die then. There is no more telling about the Fates than about any other women—they all get a man into trouble."

And Dula had me into trouble before we were two days out.

She came to me early one morning when she should have been trying to sleep. I was. The wheel was lashed, and I was sprawled on the skylight. Malua had the deck, and

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he was in the waist hobnobbing with the watch.

The details are needless. Dula had not spoken to me for two weeks. For one thing I had kept out of her way. To be unable to keep her face out of my mind was disturbing enough without coming closer.

She came up as if we had parted but an hour ago, the best of friends. I mean that without any explanation at all for the chilliness she had radiated toward me, without any apology or expectation of one, she came and sat down on the skylight beside me when I sat up. She had a favor to ask, of course.

She called me Dan. But then all the other women in the village did, or tried to —usually said "Lan"; there is no "d" in their language—so perhaps Dula came by it unconsciously. But somehow to hear her say it was not, for instance, like when Laulai said it.

"Why have you tried so hard to stay away from me, Dan?" she asked after a few remarks on the soft, pleasing weather.

I don't know what I wanted to say. Certainly something different from what I did say. What I did say was of no importance. Something vague about having been working hard, very hard.

She smiled. It was a real smile with nothing reserved in it. She smiled receptively, as if any explanation would have done as well. I doubt if she heard what I said, for she asked at once with a little stir of eagerness if I had told Williams how Tom Gibson had met death.

"After being bribed to silence with so much jewelry?" I said. I was a little hurt. I don't know what by; but I felt hurt anyway.

"Please do," she said quickly, leaning toward me.

Her dark face with its strange irregular lines was close to mine. Her thick hair was matted down and covered her ears. Her eyes were earnest, pleading.

"You will, won't you?" she added.

"You tell him. He'll be interested. Very. Williams likes to hear things."

"Please do, Dan."

"Father Rinieri—didn't you tell him?"

"Dan—" there was a little note of pleading impatience— "Father Rinieri is a priest."

"And Williams is a pirate. It won't shock him either."

"Please, I am in earnest! I want him to know. I can't tell him. Don't you see I can't?"

"Why didn't Father Rinieri tell him?"

"Repeat a confession!" she exclaimed with a low overtone of horror.

I said that I had heard him.

"You listened!" Dula hardened a little in an instant.

It seemed that I was guilty of something terrible. But I was stubbornly shameless; so much so that she seemed a little confused. Anyway she explained that what Father Rinieri had had confided with him was something separate and apart from the confessional. That being a differentiation I did not understand or care anything about.

The point was that she wanted Williams to know it was not only her knife but her hand that had struck poor inoffensive Gibson. She had thought it over. She now wanted him to know.

Something internally goaded me, and I said:

"You want Williams to know you did it for him. Your story told by even Father Rinieri hasn't moved him as you thought it would. Is that it?

"You love him, don't you? You went in a passion over that word love once, but it's different now—isn't it?

"You were afraid he would be horrified if he knew about Gibson, so you wouldn't let him know that. Now you want me to tell him. If he is horrified you can say I lied!"

She struck me across the face with her palm. She said—

"You are a beast!"

And she left me.

However, I did what she wanted. I did tell Williams everything—down to the palm-blow in the face.

He looked at me hard with anger gathering in his eyes. I had known that all the time and said nothing? He thought that I was his friend, not the confederate of any strange woman that happened to be on his ship.

"But she did it for you!" I cried, involuntarily pleading for her in an uneasy effort to justify myself.

"And you did it for her!" he said. "You love her, McGuire. I knew that from the first. The thing called love makes strange fools."

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I denied it with might and main, with outpoured oaths and hard-flung gestures.

He said something about an innocent man never overemphasizing his plea.

"Good God!" I cried; "then do you love her?"

A thin crooked smile hung itself on his lips. Motionless, he looked at me, fire in his eyes, and a cryptic, twisted line on his hard mouth.

I could say nothing more; and he gave no answer except what I chose to read in the anger of his eyes and the crooked smile that may have been sardonic or may have been confessional. I do not know.

SO on we went day after day, as miserable a boat-load as ever ruffled the sea. I wished with embittered futility that I had at no time kept anything back from Williams.

Hawkins became my solace and companion, though there were times when I hated his big fat bellying body, his heavy rumbling voice. But I talked with him; told him much—and much I didn't tell.

"Cheer up, Red-Top; cheer-o. We're rollin' down to Dakaru. Lots o' drink there, old mate. An' eat—oh!"

"What's that you said oncet? Blood'll be splashed to the moon. Funny, wasn't it? Carp Taylor's the man this Lord Davenant o' ourn hired to take 'im to Dakaru."

"Taylor split my head an' walloped me 'cross the hatch. Beat up an unconscious fellow—me! An' Davenant got his floggin' wide awake. Raulson says he's never seen his face—just shoves the tucker through the door. Sometimes it ain't touched——

"Say, little Raikes is scared frozen. Says he was drunk at Lelela—didn't want to steal the ship. He ain't through pesterin' me yet t' b'lieve he done me a favor that day on the fo'c's'le. Maybe he did, Red-Top. Maybe he did."

"The whole pack o' the men are scared as Raikes that Williams 'll turn the natives loose on 'em. 'Cept Cockney Geroge. He keeps at me to know 'ow 'e 'll be rewarded."

"Say, I glimpsed a native sharpenin' Williams' knife. What does that mean, Red-Top?"

I told him for Heaven's sake to stop that interminable chatter; that his tongue was long as a bowsprit, his mouth empty as a rat-eaten cheese. All that nonsense when there were important things to worry about! The world had shifted from its foundation, and everything was topsyturvy.

What did I mean? Listen: That woman was a trouble-maker. She was after Williams. No, it would have been simple if she had merely wanted to kill him. But she wanted him to love her—and she looked just like the woman that had had him hanged. And he had loved her!

Ought to make him hate this one? Of course it ought. But what man does as he should?

"And how many women could you hate that looked like the first one you loved? And she hasn't worn that black coat with red lining—not since Williams was shot."

"What has that to do with it? Lots—only I don't know in what way. She is like that; black on the surface and crimsonly passionate inside of her."

"She has flung herself at him, Hawkins. Flung herself at him! And I'm not sure she hasn't brought him to her moorings!"

"Think of it, man! She came out here to kill her father—her own blood-father. And love was stronger than the hate that was put into her in the nursery."

She thinks it was the priest that moved her—but it was Williams. It was Williams, I tell you.

"And look at him, Hawkins. He's not like you and me. He hates the very sight of drunken beach-combers like you and me. But he'd wade through blood neck-deep to —— and pull either one of us out—because he thinks it would be right."

"Right? Right! What the —— is right? Maybe it tells in some of those queer books he reads.

"Do you know why he's coming here? It's to give back this ship to Grahame for the one we stole when we were here before! Some more of that —— right of his. The same as when he wrecks black-birders and sets natives loose—likely enough to murder the next white men that come!"

"He does that; and yet—Goog ——, Man, have you ever seen him kill? *Pouf—Pouf—Pouf* with knife or gun. And never a quiver—no more than if he was spearing fish! Aye, he's been hanged himself, so probably he knows how little life is worth."

"No, you fool, I'm not drunk! I'm sober—that's what 's the matter with me!"

. . . . And the next morning we had raised Dakaru.

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CHAPTER XIV

WE WERE sighted from afar by the people at Dakaru, and a boat met us at the mouth of the narrow little bay entrance.

A Portuguese was in the boat with many natives, velvety black fellows from Western Melanesia.

He called out ill-temperedly in broken English to know who we were and what we wanted.

From our stern through cupped hands a quick loud roar of Hawkins—

"Hurricane Williams!"

The Portuguese stayed not to learn more. That boat started off for the shore, and we could hear him cursing the rowers for their slowness.

We came in almost motionless. The wind was dead. We rode with the tide and scarcely drifted. The sails were down.

So close inside as almost to block the entrance—but not actually to block it—we let go an anchor.

There were two ships in the harbor besides the *Sally Martin*. One was a little clipper-like craft moored off the landing. That was Grahame's. The other was a tub of a brig. With almost inaudible surprize Hawkins identified her as the *Fijian Maid*—Carp Taylor's ship.

The anchor was hardly down before a small boat hit the water; Malua and a half-dozen natives jumped down into it, and Williams shoved a piece of folded paper into my hand.

"For Grahame," he said, and pointed across the bay.

All that hurry left me rather dazed. I was into the boat and being rowed off before I was hardly aware of having started.

Dakaru had been roughly sketched in lines of beauty by the Great Landscape Gardener that laid out His many Edens in the South Seas; and for years Grahame had been using up ship-loads of blacks in improvements. He did not run his plantation for money, but threw the profits away. Isolation suited him better than commerce.

He had a lugger or two on the other end of the island, and he raked the bottom of a large virgin atoll for pearl and shell. This paid his expenses and gave him the name of being rich. A queer life, a queer character; but something centrifugal in the northern, civilized lands seemed to have thrown out the men of queer, grotesque minds and purposes, and they landed in those seas.

The paper Williams gave me was not sealed. So I read it. I would probably have read it any way.

GRAHAME:

I have brought you back a ship, not to satisfy you—but myself. I shall have to take her out again to get away. Put your own crew on her and they can bring her back. She is yours.

I have two passengers for Dakaru, but one may not want to stay. You may not want the other to leave. I wish an answer at once. WILLIAMS.

I reflected on that note. I almost grinned at the irony of Williams satisfying his curious sense of honor by returning at Dakaru a ship he had stolen from other hands than Grahame's at Turkee.

But it had ever been so. He could not escape such irony, and probably saw it, felt it, much as any man. Good people have a hard enough time doing what they think is right; but an outlaw—he rides the horns of dilemma.

"Two passengers." The one that might not want to stay was surely the woman. "You may not want the other to leave"; that was subtlely sardonic.

Had Williams, so strangely faithful to his promise, brought Davenant all the way to Dakaru expecting Grahame would kill him? Perhaps there was at once punishment for Davenant and a favor to Grahame in that. Williams had a grim sense of justice.

THE boat swept on rapidly toward the landing. Many people were waiting there. Some had rifles in their hands. Overhead gulls swirled, crying harshly. I heard the deep bay of a dog, and saw two among the group on the beach.

Malua shouted. The rowers lifted their oars. The boat streaked rapidly broadside to the landing, and the boys grappled with its coral wall, bringing blood through the scratches on their hands but holding the boat.

I got out slowly, going up the slimy landing-steps, and faced a squat little black Portuguese armed to his chin, and a whip in his hand. He was not alone. Two other dirty-looking Portuguese were with him. Their clothes were clean enough but they looked dirty anyway.

"——, w'at you want?" he demanded overbearingly.

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I glanced searchingly along the landing. A white man was there, but it wasn't Grahame. This man had a beard; and Grahame was taller than he. Black boys and women were there, huddled curiously, sensing in their marvelous way that trouble was in the air.

"Grahame," I said.

"No see him."

The dirty squat man was trying to be mean in the way he spoke.

I started forward. He blocked my way.

My hair isn't red for nothing, and I never was likely to be intimidated in daylight by Portuguese. At night when any shadow may hold a knife—that is different. Besides Williams through his glasses was probably watching me.

I pointed to the boat where Malua and the boys stood with heads and shoulders above the landing, watching.

"Get out of my way. Get out, or those Samoans 'll come up here. And there won't be enough Portuguese left to show your own natives where to bury you!"

They gave way; whether because of my "valiant" words, or because the heavy hand of the white man who had approached seemed about to jerk the other two aside, I do not know. He roughly pushed one out of his way and faced me.

"What d'you want?" he said unpleasantly.

"I've a message for Grahame," I told him and made a movement with the hand that held the folded paper.

"Give it to me," and he reached for it.

"Who are you?"

"What does that ——"—he referred to Williams with the use of many words that must be left to the imagination, though the imagination of most people will be unable to supply them— "—— want here?"

Adding:

"I'm Carpenter Taylor. He'd better go about with the tide an' get to —— out of here. What 'd you want with Grahame?"

"Supposin' you go out and tell him all that. I'm not much good at delivering messages—unless they're written. Like this one. Where is Grahame?"

"Give it to me. Grahame's a sick man."

Again he reached for the paper.

He was a broad-shouldered, short-legged man, with a short, tobacco-smeared beard and a thick nose.

"Listen to my words of wisdom, Captain Taylor. Unless I put this in Grahame's own hands Hurricane Williams himself 'll come ashore an' do it. And he hasn't changed much since you last met him—an' put your blacks back on the beach!"

There was a sting in that phrase, and it jabbed Carp Taylor where he had a sore memory.

He wished that dog Williams would come ashore. He'd find it different at Dakaru now. The —— thief. Just let him set his feet on the sands——

"I think I can deliver that message all right—but this one first."

"Are you fellows here after trouble?" he demanded, his thick arms bristling from his sides.

He probably felt the security of numbers, the Portuguese, the dogs, the high wall, fort-like, about the house; and with those odds on his side he was ready to fight.

"You're talking to the wrong man, captain. You want to go out and speak to Williams of those things. He can tell you. I can't."

More words equally futile and uninteresting passed between us; then he decided to lead me to Grahame.

WE WENT up the white sanded roadway lined with slabs of coral, and along the coral were planted roses. Half a ship-load, so I had heard, of clay soil had been brought up from Australia to bed roses. The grilled iron gates of the eight-foot wall were closed but unlocked.

On every side were the marks of long, hard work from human hands. Grahame had used up his blacks much as the old kings of Egypt had used up their *fellaheen.* Inside of the walls were masses of flowers and trees and stretches of green lawn: jasmine, hibiscus, trumpet-flowers, acacia, and great flame-tipped poinsettia, the sweet wild-orange and enormous shrubs sagging under the weight of bright-winged blossoms. Cockatoos fluttered drowsily in the shadows of fig-trees and complained irritably.

The house—a half-mile from the beach—was a low, great-flanked structure based with coral mortar and breasted with vines that reached over and festooned the low broad veranda, burying it in cool shadows. The big wide door of carved oak had been sent out from England.

"Fever," Carp Taylor had explained, significantly jerking a thick hand toward the house, and adding—

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"Some men can't drink—in this climate."

As we trudged along, the sand grinding under his shoes—I was barefoot—he spoke of what was uppermost in his mind—

"What d'you fellows want here anyhow?"

And again without waiting for an answer he added—

"I'm in charge here—since Grahame's sick."

He looked at me; and I thought there was something queer in his eyes, something like hope, great expectations lurking there a little furtively. Well, it was a rich plantation; and if Grahame died who would get it? The first man to claim it.

There was the girl, the bright-haired little angel that had got down from the Florentine wall where some old Italian artist had 'prisoned her, and wandered to Dakaru—but what was a girl child between a man and his loot?

He stopped on the veranda with his hand at the door to come back to his question. He asked it with a strained effort at friendliness, confidence-inviting, as if he had been thinking things over and did not want trouble. Perhaps he would seek for the soft answer to turn away Williams. What did we want, anyway?

I answered with reasonable truth in saying I did not know, that I sailed with Hurricane Williams and inquired not at all into his business.

He stared at me for a moment or two. His eyes were dull, but a cunning light was at the back of them. There was something thick and clod-like about the man, even to his eyes, and tongue too. He took a nubbin of tobacco from his trousers pocket, bit into it, worked his jaws and said:

"Grahame's queer. I'm warnin' you. Fever—an' rum."

We went in.

The door swung back noiselessly. Though it was dark and cool inside, and for a few seconds I could scarcely distinguish anything, I had the impression of forms vanishing. There was certainly the soft *plop-plop* of light bare feet in the distance.

"Black girls," said Carp Taylor. "Grahame coddles 'em. Kills his natives out there—but here——"

He laughed low, coarsely.

"Don't want that girl o' his'n to know he'd hurt a fly!"

He laughed again. It was if not humorous at least queer.

As I rapidly grew used to the dimness I saw that we had entered not into a room but into a wide hall with great open doors on either side. On the right I caught a glimpse of rows of books and chairs. We passed on down the mat-covered hall.

Taylor opened a door. A native woman, having heard us, was at the same time opening the door.

Grahame lay on a great wide bed. Everything was spacious in that house. By the bed was a teak table. Its three legs in the form of slender dragons' bodies ran to above the edge of the table and became little black savage monsters, watchfully leering about the room.

On the table was a glass, a bowl of sugar, a few limes, sliced, and a bottle of rum. Wretched medicine for fever.

Grahame raised himself on his pillows and stared forward. He was thin, wasted. His long mustache was now scarcely more than streaked with black and drooped far below his chin dispiritedly. His hair had thinned and was long and white.

The native woman effacedly, patiently, stood to one side of the large open window, through which I caught a glimpse of a peering child. He saw me look at him and at once began to pull a long rope, and a breath of air stirred down from the ceiling from a *punkah*.

On the other side of the bed from me sat the girl, the girl of the bright hair, her elbows on the bed and her slender hands almost invisible against the covering of pure white *tappa* cloth. A large pearl, like a miniature harvest moon in a faint mist, was on a finger.

But she was a girl no longer; the tropics rush flowers, fruit and maidens to their ripening overnight; and men to seed. She was yet sweet and innocent and inexpressibly weary, pale, and under her eyes were faint bluish rings. She recognized me at once, and fright coiled in her purple eyes.

Grahame, though weak, spoke savagely, hoarsely.

"You come from that pig-born Williams?"

The English think they know a viler phrase than "pig-born"; but the South Seas know none. Perhaps with vicious subtlety he took the lowest word of the Samoans, among whom Williams was the brother of a chief.

"I have a message," I said, and held out my hand.

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He looked at the paper, then at me, and took it with an air of distrustfulness. His hands were nervous and shook. His fingers fumbled in opening it.

With difficulty he read; it took him a long time. So long in fact that he did not notice Carp Taylor, who had leaned forward and read too. When Grahame looked up toward me in surprize, and, seeing Taylor near, turned the paper face down on the bed coverlet, he concealed nothing.

"Father, may I?" the girl asked, her thin, almost transparent, fingers moving toward the paper.

"No, no," he said a little uneasily, pulling it away.

Silence, except for the slow and scarcely audible weaving of the *punkah* overhead and the faint crackle of the paper as Grahame with something like an air of furtiveness again read the message.

"Go out, go out," he said abruptly, nervously. "All of you go out. Taylor, get out. Eunice, I want to talk to him."

He glanced again at the paper.

"I'm all right."

Eunice stood up slowly and gave me a long, steady look of reproach. She spoke, and though her voice expressed an unforgiving bitterness it was soft and sweet.

"My father has never been well since that day," she said.

Then impulsively:

"Oh, what do you terrible men want now? Come, Nolopu."

Carp Taylor said something about himself being there to look after her and her father. But she seemed not to hear him; more than that, seemed to ignore him, though he came close to her.

I glanced scrutinizingly at the native woman. Nolopu was a Samoan name. She was a Samoan too. She did not look toward me as she went out after Taylor and the girl.

TWO hours later there were three emptied bottles of rum on the table of the dragons, and I was cold, coldly sober. My hands shook a little and my heart shivered.

Grahame—Grahame was drunk, drunk and dying. He hated death terribly, fought against it, vowed he could and would rise and walk tomorrow; that he could do so that day, that hour. He needed the rest, he said; but it didn't hurt him to talk.

He said death was months off. He hated it; but he was not afraid—except for the girl, for Eunice. Eunice had been the name of her mother. . . .

It wasn't the knife that had gone into his shoulder. —— Hurricane Williams—but drink to him again! It was his liver; too much rum. And his heart—the —— thing wobbled and sometimes tried to stop.

The first thing he had demanded as the door closed was to know who were those people that we had brought to Dakaru. I told him. His curses were frightful. They fell on the head of Francis Davenant.

It was a long time before he mentioned Dula, his daughter; then he asked what she was like, what she looked like. I can not say there was tenderness or anything akin to it, but there was no bitterness. He did not curse her.

"Williams has brought him here to hound me!" he had cried with uplifted, clenched fists.

I told of the shot into Williams' back; of Davenant lashed to the mast and beaten. Grahame laughed wickedly. He knew how that had hurt, gone deep, eaten in like the scalding of molten iron.

Then he had thrust the bottle toward me, saying—

"Drink!"

Grahame's thoughts went helter-skelter; but his tongue never stopped. When he seemed to be taking thought of what next to say his tongue mechanically cursed, and himself not least.

Such a life as had seemed ahead of him in his youth! He had been one of the youngest captains in the British Army—cavalry—and had won medals in India.

That sister of the hell-hound Davenant—he had lost his head over her. She was a woman that made a man's flesh burn! Fierce, passionate, jealous—and grew to hate him.

What could a young fool do with a woman like that, who believed her brother's lies—when he didn't even know there had been lies? Thought it was a wild woman's jealousy. Wondered in his bed if he would awaken with a knife in his throat. Of course he floated his troubles in wine!

Davenant, cold, poised, insistently friendly, idled neither day nor night from the work of ruining him. The cause? God knew, perhaps.

There were clubs and messes where not

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even the son of a marquis was welcome. Grahame would not try to take him into them.

Rumors of a kind never told except in whispers went from mouth to mouth with his name. Once a friend pointedly insulted Davenant, and Grahame kept the friend still.

Nor could he shake Davenant off. The wife loved the brother. The door was always open. Davenant, cold, inscrutable, seemed friendly. There was no shaking him off. . . .

Fellow officers in Captain Grahame's quarters for an evening's sport found themselves playing with marked cards. There was nothing to do but what he did. Resign.

He thought his wild wife had revenged her jealousies. A bitter quarrel—and Davenant gave him sympathy. Grahame, himself slipping out of his caste and class, his own name going about in whispers, began to lean on Davenant's friendship.

All friends and family shunned him except a cousin, Eunice, an angel. They had loved, but cousins may not marry. It is wicked. He had forgotten the love a little; let it bury itself. She had kept it burning like a secret flame. . . .

Then came a murder. The friend who had insulted Davenant, who had been one of those about the table of the marked cards, when by evil fortune Grahame was winning, was dead. Shot in the back.

Davenant had said:

"Looks bad, Grahame. If you were going to do a thing like that you shouldn't have talked about it beforehand, drunk."

Grahame had protested, shaken, fearful. He had loved that friend, and he began to feel the Satanic patience and deadliness of Davenant.

"Yes, you did," Davenant answered with his slow, cold, white smile. "I could swear to it myself. My sister would too—to punish you for what she thinks is worse guilt. Other women."

Grahame had none in all the world to listen to him but the cousin who loved him. He snatched desperately right and left for what funds he could get. He took money that belonged to his wife and to Davenant, too. But he left property.

Fear of Davenant had got into his blood. He feared nothing else. Not even God. The implacable patience of the man was terrifying. Grahame had cursed himself for cowardice, but he had trembled in the belief that Davenant would search him out.

Much wandering found Dakaru. Luck gave him pearls. Nothing could be more remote, more secure; but he needed labor, and he had had blackbirders, who occasionally touched there in combing the seas, bring blacks.

A daughter was born again unto him. It was as if Heaven were to give him a whole new start, and an Eden too. They were happy and treated the blacks like children. He got Samoan girls to watch over his daughter, the kindest and most intelligent of natives.

Then the terrible thing happened—the cannibal feast. He had been at the atoll for pearls. The Samoans had hidden in the hills with the baby. . . .

Every black on the island, male and female, had been butchered, hunted down. He and his Portuguese did it. But he had to have blacks to work the island. He got others, and bloodhounds, and more Portuguese.

"The cruelest of all whites as a race," he said.

He stayed on Dakaru, for there was no place to go. Besides there was pleasure in killing blacks where they had killed her. He fed them—for food went to waste; he housed them—for he wanted their strength to fail under burdens, not under disease; and he built his plantation, his gardens, his house and his roads and his walls, as a monument to Eunice his wife, as an inheritance for Eunice her daughter.

He had to traffic with England, for no luxuries were to be denied her; and somehow Davenant had heard and reached Carp Taylor, who carried supplies and orders for Dakaru. With pearls and threats Grahame had made Carp Taylor refuse to meet Davenant as promised.

Grahame was no longer afraid of Davenant. He feared nothing except what would happen to Eunice when he died. There was nobody on earth to trust. . . .

Look at Carp Taylor, now. The beast, with his eyes looking forward across Grahame's grave. . . .

Rum was killing him. But rum he had to have. Memories would kill him quicker if he didn't have it. . . .

And Carp Taylor was all that would stand between her and the Portuguese. . . .

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Not one man on earth to trust. Not one whose oath was better than his lies.

A British man-o'-war had been in a year ago, and Grahame had fruitlessly begged the captain to raise the flag on the island. Grahame had not been as sick then. He thought the end of life was years ahead.

He ought to have sent her to England. To have gone himself. Dared everybody—been hanged as a murderer if necessary.

But she believed him a great and noble man. When shots were fired and lagging blacks fell she thought pigs or chickens were being killed.

She was all he had in life; and in eternity God wouldn't so much as let him see her from ——; he had kept her so innocent, so like her mother, that she would be too high in heaven for his eyes to reach.

Hurricane Williams—the nigger-lover; Grahame had abhorred his name for years. Officers from wandering gunboats spoke it. Blackbirders told of his hideous friendship with cannibal blacks. Even stray whalers had heard it and cursed it; for blacks armed with rifles that were said to have come from Williams fought them off at times when they landed for water, food—and women.

However, the British captain there about a year ago—who did not dare raise his flag because at that time the politicians in the Colonial Office did not like the study of geography, and evaded it by calling themselves anti-imperialists—seemed to know more about Williams than other people had known. Was it true, Grahame demanded of me, that he had been hanged—and through the lies of a fierce, beautiful, dark woman?

Actually hanged? Cut down unconscious by an impatient doctor late to his dinner-party? Saved by convicts who rolled a dummy in quicklime and buried it?

That captain had said:

"He's a dangerous man, you know. He kills quick.

"I've poked about among the trustworthiest reports of the blighter. Doesn't seem to care how or how many if they get him going.

"But take it long and short he doesn't seem to have potted many that the Queen wouldn't have paid the hangman for the crackin' of their necks—if the Crown had caught 'em with all the evidence. And a lot o' them have been natives."

And to me, said Grahame, a little incredulous, mystified, unready to believe what the facts suggested, but putting them straight:

"When he left Dakaru that time there were two dead cannibals inside the wall—where it's always death for any of those blacks to be. Eunice and the women saw him kill them. He tried to kill me—but he— You were with him, —— you, and did he do it to protect her?"

I nodded.

"Then, curse him, we'll drink to his health. Get out another bottle from that chest.

"Carp Taylor and all of 'em think I'm rich. But it's all in that chest. Rum! And in the atoll—pearls, unfished."

He laughed sardonically in a kind of malicious glee. More soberly:

"That ring that Eunice wears—it was one of the first I found. Her mother used to wear it. I'd cut my heart out and sell it first."

I brought a third bottle from the chest. His hand shook so that more was spilled, far more, than went into the glass; and the glass was filled.

His wavering hand held the bottle out to me. I took it. He picked up the glass and from his trembling the liquor fell in little unheeded splashes over the brim, wetting the white coverlet, staining it more and more with deep brown spots.

"Here's to ——"

He stopped, put down the glass awkwardly, drunkenly, and fumbled about for the paper Williams had sent. He found it, laboriously opened it. His fingers could not hold it steady; and the lines would not remain in place before his eyes. He thrust it at me.

"The first line—read that. Then we'll drink.

" 'To satisfy himself.' Curse him, he's a man!

"I don't want his ship. He can have it. He can have all the ships I've got. The yacht, the luggers, all of 'em.

"He kills niggers, too, does he? Does he? —— you, answer me! Then we'll drink to 'im!

" 'To satisfy himself!'

"Curse him, he writes like a gentleman. Is he? Is he?

"Oh, these —— tropics! Don't he drink? Then we'll drink to 'im more 'an ever!"

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Grahame was more than drunk. I was more than sober. I was cold. There was the mark on him of one toward whom Death's invisible hand is outstretched.

The name of Davenant had smitten his memories, given tinder to his fever; and the rum had unleashed the cords of his tongue. Time had struck two hours from the life of each of us.

Then the door opened. Carp Taylor, followed by Davenant, Dula, Eunice, came in.

CHAPTER XV

CARP TAYLOR had sent a false message to Williams and had had the two passengers, whom he guessed were Francis Davenant and his "daughter"—known to him as relatives whom Grahame, jealous of his isolation, did not want to see—brought ashore.

I must guess—if I am to arrive at it at all—what the purpose of Carp Taylor was. Certain wisps of conversation were overheard by both Laulai and Nolopu and repeated eventually to me.

Perhaps Carp Taylor, with an itch for deviltry, didn't himself quite know what he was up to; though in also sending word to Williams that I was helping pick a crew that would go out with the ship and bring her back, there was probably at the back of his head the vague idea of rushing natives and Portuguese on board in the guise of a crew and seizing her, evening an old score, getting reward-money and renown, and also control of a valuable schooner.

However, I shall put down with a brevity of opinion what I know to be so, and those who wish may do their own guessing at his motives.

There appears to be a kind of masonry among the devil's disciples that plunges them even when strangers into sullen fellowship and plot-weaving. When Davenant stepped on the landing he shook a fist at the *Sally Martin* and cursed Williams. In some moments then of quick speech, questions and answers, Davenant and Carp Taylor were in agreement as to what should happen to Williams.

Davenant's fury at him seems to have displaced, for the time at least, revenge toward Grahame, whom he had sought half-way across the world.

AS THEY came into the room I tried to stand up, with my face twisted back over my shoulder. My knees were limber and my feet heavy—from sitting so long, probably.

I threw out a steadying, groping hand and touched Davenant. He did not notice; he, almost madly, was already talking. But I jerked my hand back with the shuddering impression of having touched something snaky. Gripping the foot of Grahame's bed, I stood there, holding on tightly.

Dula and Eunice—distinct as figures from a tableau of Night and Day—were side by side. Eunice trembled and on her face was a frozen look of fearfulness. She was frightened but baffled too.

The evil that the world has in it was abruptly appearing before her. She did not understand, but she was afraid; also dazed by many surprizing things. She held on to Dula's arm, and Dula's fingers were pressed reassuringly against the fragile hand that held her arm.

Eunice had met them at the door. Carp Taylor had tried to make some kind of introduction — something awkward about being "relatives"—and Dula had glided forward with hands out, saying—

"I am your sister!"

Laulai had at first thought Eunice was a woman with no tongue, one that couldn't speak. She was so silent.

Eunice did not believe it, of course; or more likely did not think of disbelieving it, of taking it literally. Her utter loneliness of life would have made any woman of her own race endearingly welcome and given her the dazed impression of the miraculous.

It would probably never have occurred to her to follow the men into her father's room. But she followed Dula. She knew, perhaps psychically, that Dula was strong and wise.

For all of the forced blooming of the tropics, Eunice was little more than a child, and a handful of dirt spread out on an oceanic mountain had been her world. And when a woman is utterly innocent she has little left besides the urge to be loved, guided, sheltered, and an eagerness to trust.

I am still a little uncertain of what were my actual impressions in that room. Whether I noted at the time that Dula was like another and even more wondrous woman, or am influenced in my memory by

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the later revelation, I can't say. It doesn't matter.

She stood there alert, tense, her eyes on Grahame in a fascinated sort of way—her whole being concentrated in a kind of agonized suspense as to what he would reply to Davenant. And as I remember her through the shifting haze that clings to that room her attitude was not that of some one awaiting a decision so much as that of some one withholding judgment.

Davenant, as he came into the room, with a sweep of his hand had seemed to discard all the hate between him and Grahame. At least that was his offer in words as he cut interruptingly through the awkward effort at some kind of explanation begun by Carp Taylor.

Williams was to be caught and Davenant was to be given the right to kill him. Those were the terms of the peace offer flung impassionedly at Grahame. And Davenant took it for granted that Grahame was not only wishful on any terms of wiping out the grudge between them, but that he would be eager to end Hurricane Williams.

The shock of surprize, that put a quite stupid expression on Grahame's face when the door had opened, rapidly gave way to a look of absorbed interest. Then his two thin, wasted hands stroked the drooping mustache, pulling the ends back along the lines of his prominent jawbone.

He grinned. He laughed. For the length of such a moment as a gambler feels while the dice are falling, I could not tell what that laugh meant—whether pleased acquiescence or pleased scorn.

A second later and there was no doubt. He was jeering at Davenant.

Grahame spoke. His voice was hoarse and strained and evilly gleeful. Williams? Williams was the one man left on earth to have his friendship.

I glanced toward the women. Eunice's face was covered with distress; nothing could have seemed further from reason than what she was hearing her father say.

Dula leaned forward. Her dark face was aglow. Incredulous, amazed, she pressed the closed fingers of one hand to her cheek as if to grip back her delight.

Oh-ho-ho! Did Davenant's flesh still hurt from the bitter caress of hemp? To be beaten like a dog—and be the son of a marquis, too!

Then came curses and a tumult of broken sentences, scarcely connected phrases, as Grahame told of the things he could not forget—things much the fresher in his mind for having just rehearsed them to me.

Sick, drunk, feverish, he was burning up the very marrow of his bones to say what he wanted to say in that half-hour's supreme revenge on an old enemy that came with a truce on his lips. Strange; but though drunk, feverish, there was a cold sardonic strain in Grahame's fury, due no doubt to the exalted sense of triumph.

"Grahame," Davenant had said excitedly, "we cross our score from the books — by-gones wiped out— I want the life of that Williams— These hands shall drip with his blood—! You know, Winwood Grahame, when I want a man's life not God himself can keep me from getting it! Shall I let that dog live?

"Get him on shore, Grahame. Get him on shore. After all, we ought to be friends, Grahame. You and I——

"And I can't sleep, I can't eat, I can't rest, I can't die, till that dog has been drowned in his own blood at my feet! . . . By —— Grahame, I swear to forget everything between us——

"After all, w'ere of a family, Winwood. You never liked me, and I hated you for that——

"But I'll go back to London. Don't you see all I want in this life or in the next is the whine for pity in my ears from that dog, as he dies?"

It was then Grahame had laughed and begun to speak. And before he had finished he had said Williams was a man; that he would trust Williams. . . .

"If you hate him, you devil-born snake, he is my friend. He can have my ships, my money, my land, my island.

"Wipe out any of my score with you! I've lived wickedly as I could just to be sure of hell, where I can rake coals over you, you black-hearted, double-tongued, venomous spider.

"Williams—I'm going to make Williams my friend so there will be something more than old ruffian blackbirders and Portuguese to look after Dakaru when I'm dead!"

AFTERWARD I found my hands were cramped—so tightly I had gripped, hanging on, the foot of the bed.

I remember assuring myself in the pause

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after Grahame stopped that it wasn't so—none of it—nothing of it, possibly excepting the rum, which was Jamaican in flavor and always treacherous.

Also, part of the time the room swayed and heaved like a ship in long swells. And though everything seemed to be taking place at a distance, a great distance off, as things do on the stage or in dreams, I saw and heard perfectly.

The trouble was that I couldn't be sure that it happened just as I saw it. There are times when a man isn't sure of the things he sees and hears. I stared hard and saw clearly, but the picture was jumbled and for a little while not believable.

Why should Grahame have thrown himself back, his body writhing under the brown-stained coverlet, his lean fingers tearing at his breast, and his face twisted as if fighting with somebody, when nobody had touched him?

Dula swiftly reached him—and I gasped. But she did not strike. There was no knife in her hands. She talked to him rapidly. She was not angry.

It was hard to catch what she said, for Eunice was crying, with her eyes open; and sobbing something too. The innocent are always helpless in the midst of evil, being truly meant for heaven rather than for earth. She stood twisting her slender, transparent fingers, almost choking herself with:

"Poor, poor father! What is wrong? Oh, dear God!"

Davenant was motionless; and there seemed to be nothing to him but eyes—like a basilisk, a basilisk that had been in some way terribly surprized and angered. I once saw a madman, and his eyes were like that; only Davenant's did not roll or move. Just glared.

From a long way off there were shouts, indistinct, excited.

I thought at first that it was Carp Taylor shouting, and that his voice in some weird way was barely reaching me. He had Davenant's arm. Both hands were on Davenant's arm.

When I understood his words at all they were close enough, though a little muffled by his beard and thick tongue and the effort not to have what he said go beyond Davenant's ears. But Taylor was agitated.

"Bide your time. We'll get 'im. Grahame? He's drunk an' crazy. 'Nother spell of his heart."

People were excited away off some place. The shouts came faintly. I heard because my ears in a kind of trance-like daze were straining to catch words from wherever they fell.

"Father ——"

That was not Eunice's voice.

I leaned swayingly over the bed.

"— I am sorry—I am sorry. Oh, God, how I have thought wrong of you!"

Grahame was lying back, quiet now. His trembling arms lifted with effort toward Dula's low-bent face. But her face was too far away—probably swimming in the distance before his dulled eyes. He was breathing with his mouth open, heavily, wearily.

Dula put her hands to his face, but his jaw fell away again. She stroked his forehead and cheeks, and when her hands were withdrawn his eyes were closed and his mouth, too.

"Sh-h," said Dula to Eunice, who was about to throw herself across the bed, weeping. "He's asleep."

I CAME out of my trance-like condition with a start. My hair stood up, or tried to. The rest of me could not move.

Davenant, on his way toward the door, for the first time seemed to notice me. His were at that moment the eyes that petrify. His bearded lips curled back. The clenched white teeth showed in a grimace meant for a smile.

"I'll kill you—now!" he hissed in a fearful, low, almost confidential whisper.

His hand struck down to his belt, but it did not come out with a knife. The door opened in his face, and Hurricane Williams stood in the doorway.

I won't be more glad to see the angel that comes down into hell with my pardon written in mother's tears, signed by God.

Now it was one thing for a man to say that he couldn't rest or sleep or eat, or anything like that, until Williams was dead. It was another and very different thing to stand to his face and try to kill him. Practically all the blows ever struck at Williams came from behind.

His face was hard then, even harder, more severe in line and bronze-like, than was usual. His eyes could outstare a basilisk.

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Davenant drew back unsteadily. Williams gave him no more than a glance. No more than a glance went to Carp Taylor. His eyes paused on my face, and burned; I was drunk again.

Carp Taylor plucked Davenant by the arm, and they went out.

Williams looked at Dula, then at Grahame, then at Dula and said:

"You had better wake him. The *Friedrich* is in the offing."

THAT was how we were trapped at Dakaru. *Friedrich* had cannon, steam and fourscore men or thereabouts. There was no escaping her.

Captain Lumholtz had stopped at Apia and displayed his prisoner. He was indubitably recognized as nothing like Hurricane Williams. So Shaylor's version of the story was at last really believed.

Captain Lumholtz, furious, returned to Lelela. The *Sally Martin* had gone. There was a set-to with the natives. Much of the village was burned. European chancelleries eventually heard that there had been a native war at Lelela, and that sailors from the *Friedrich* landed to protect German interests.

It was the usual explanation—only the agitation started at Lelela led some years later to real native wars. The upshot of the affair was that the Germans with a combination of cunning and bluff ultimately secured possession of both Upolu and Savaii—the richest and largest islands.

The *Friedrich* had hastened on toward Dakaru, struck the southern tip of the island and came north along the coast to Grahame's harbor. That was how she chanced to be almost on top of Williams before being seen.

"THE gunboat!" Dula exclaimed in a low voice, coming anxiously toward him.

Williams' eyes met hers, and in hers were alarm, tenderness, a caressing anxiety.

"Can you get away?" she asked breathlessly.

At the same time she was very close to him and made a little gesture as if to put her hands on him. Then she drew them back.

I don't think she noticed at all what she was doing with her hands. The urge to touch him was strong. For that one moment the urge was repressed by the forces of hesitancy that dwell in women to keep them modest, or what is thought to be modest.

"I don't know," he said, his eyes very narrow.

It was too late to try to take out a ship. Besides the *Friedrich* had steam. May the curse of all good deep-water seamen fall on him who first put boilers into ships and gave a brute with a shovel place over bold sailormen who straddle the yard and grip the leech.

"Wake him," Williams said. "He ought to meet her. The German is wild. I'm taking to the hills. I came for McGuire."

"Watch out for Davenant! Oh, please! But he—" she put her hand toward Grahame; her eyes did not leave Williams' face—"he was magnificent! He said——"

The boom of guns, reverberantly crashing, came upon us.

The Germans, right at the mouth of the harbor, had sent a broadside into the *Sally Martin*. She was deserted. There was no reason for the broadside except that the *Friedrich* was very angry with her and had cannon. The poor *Sally Martin* was sadly shattered between wind and water.

Williams turned abruptly.

"Come, McGuire."

I moved a little unsteadily. I could walk all right, but probably from standing still so long my feet had grown a bit awkward.

Eunice, with her hands to her ears, collapsed trembling into a chair.

Dula caught at Williams' arm.

Then there was revealed the woman within her, that mystic woman that had seemed to lurk under the black cloak, lined with crimson; that had nestled in the shadows behind the curtains of eyes, dark and impenetrable. How scant the line between crime and love; and often the line is erased. Her potentiality for either was great.

It takes something of the recklessness of crime for a woman to break through the instinctive hesitancy of her sex and speak as Dula spoke—of love, to Hurricane Williams. I knew her; with an inner sheltered vanity I felt that I knew her as no man alive knew her; and I was not surprized at the way she spoke.

From that night in the shack at Turkee when I, drunk, had thrust a wavering candle to her face and stood fascinated, I had not doubted that she would do whatever

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she wanted to do; and her love of Hurricane Williams had not been hidden.

She would leave no way for him to be unaware of it. She even had had me confess for her to murder; which was scarcely less daring than the deed itself. Somehow both deed and vicarious confession seemed far from her at that hour; as far removed as the chill, Satanic beauty that had thrilled me shiveringly in the flickering candlelight, when I first saw her.

Beauty she now had, too; but it was softer, not cruel. Her face was suffused with an anxious tenderness.

How when a leopard can not change his spots can women so change? It may be that within them they do not change, but only cast off cloaks, draw back curtains.

The hearts of all of them perhaps are as the alabaster box broken above the head of Christ. I doubt not but that He Who knows all things, knows the inmost hearts of the wicked and loves them for what they might be if ever their hearts were struck open, as was the alabaster box of precious ointment of spikenard.

"Whom else," I have asked bitterly of myself, "but some man fierce and stern could have struck fire from her—taught in the nursery to kiss a knife over which curses had been said?"

The very iron and flinty mold that gave her disturbing fear lest he could not be moved, made her love him.

And now her hour had come for speaking out, even to his face. Some psychic sense may have warned her that what is put off to the morrow may not always be done. Perhaps too the great fear that his last chance of escape from Dakaru was utterly lost increased the eager tension to have done with doubts.

Her face, its strange irregular outline framed by the downward coils of hair, so black as to have something of a raven's sheen, was aglow with daring as she looked up and said with sweet and low inflections, clear but almost whispering:

"I love you, Hurricane Williams. . . . Am I without shame for having told you in a hundred ways? And now I use the words: I love you.

"Something made me nearly love you when I first heard of you. And you were so like what I wanted you to be when I first saw you—so unlike what I had feared, Hurricane Williams.

"I love the very name! . . . Oh, I shall blush to remember this minute, but I shall blush without shame. I love you—I love you—I love you! . . . And oh, I am afraid for you!

"Gra—my father—he is my father!—he was wonderful. . . . All the prayers of all the saints can not relieve me of my sorrow for the way I hated him. I will waken him. He's worn out. He will help you no matter what."

I hated Hurricane Williams at that moment. I could have forgiven him—and her too—if he had swept her into his arms. I don't know what I would have forgiven them for; but there would have been forgiveness anyhow.

He did not fling her away—there would never have been forgiveness then. But he was like a man fleshed with bronze.

He scarcely moved. He did not turn from her. He did not draw his arm away.

He looked from her to Grahame. His eyes paused steadily, searchingly, on Grahame's face and seemed to be looking far beyond the death-like mask of the man that lay there.

With the nearest thing to softness that ever came into his voice he said, interrupting her:

"No. Don't try to waken him. That will be best. Let him sleep—sleep."

He stopped, but he had not finished. Dula, as she had said, shameless, had her hands on his breast. She stood close to him and waited, her cheeks on fire, her eyes brightly eager.

"First there must be a fight out there."

He motioned slightly.

"Then I will come back."

"You will come back to me?" she whispered.

Her hands reached caressingly to his burned, leathern face.

"I will come back," he repeated evenly.

She did not seem to notice what little that really promised. She saw only the promise, and read it by the flame of her desire.

"Kiss me! Kiss me! Oh, kiss me and kill me. . . . That's how I love you!"

She put his unresisting arm around her and with tiptoed tenseness, her dark eyes burning hungrily, reached up—waiting—to him.

Then the rattle of rifles, shouts, cries. He turned from her as if snapped by a spring.

"McGuire!"

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His hand caught my shoulder. I was almost flung through the door; and it closed on something like a sob—as a woman of great thirst might sob when she pressed lips to a glass, suddenly empty.

I hung back stubbornly, his hand on my wrist gripping like a manacle, riveted.

"Stop till I tell you, skipper. I'm not drunk—I've heard things. What's an old gunboat and Germans! Listen to me. Grahame——"

The way he said it left no doubt. The way he knew I never thought. The words fell slowly—

"Grahame is dead."

CHAPTER XVI

THE Germans were coming ashore; two boat-loads of them.

The half-dozen Portuguese were excitedly firing at the blacks, a party of whom, scenting trouble, began it. They defiantly ran away and refused orders. They had learned that Hurricane Williams was on the island.

So potent was his name that even cannibals who had never seen a white man knew of him. Stories filter and spread through the islands' bush. The blacks probably thought he had come to set them loose, and a party impatiently precipitated their freedom by loosening themselves. Others joined. The blacks were in rebellion.

The Portuguese were excited. Bloodhounds had been set on the natives. One had been killed—one dog, I mean. Several natives were shot. Stones and clubs and tools had driven the other dogs back.

The blacks, with yells of triumph, were bearing the dead dog off for a feast. No doubt they would have much preferred to have a Portuguese.

A third boat, loaded, was leaving the *Friedrich*.

The white men from off the *Sally Martin* slouched dispiritedly down on the landing. They had not been given arms. They were not given arms.

Hawkins was with Malua and the Samoans, who, grouped under the trees, were at a strategic point between the landing and the walled garden.

There was a disturbing uneasiness within me, and no hope. Williams, I told myself, did not have a chance. Numbers were against him. The sea was closed to him. Dakaru was too small an island to hide out on successfully. And men he couldn't trust were all about him.

The blacks, now amuck, might chant his praise in their feast-dance; and they might also try to use him for the feast. Possibly not; but all that afternoon my heart sagged, and I thought thoughts that made me sorry for things it was too late to mend.

And I made vows, more or less feelingly designed to tempt the Lord to spare me. He did so. But the Lord is all-wise, and He knew anyhow that I could never keep my vows.

"I seen Carp Taylor talkin' to 'em——" Hawkins motioned toward the Portuguese, who, bunched together, now shot rapidly at the blacks far out of range and now turned to watch the oncoming boats.

"I seen him pointin' up there, too."

He indicated the house from which Williams and I had just come.

"I yelled at 'im:

" 'What you doin', you old —— ——? Hirin' 'em to shoot us in the back, you old —— —— ——?' "

And regarding Carp Taylor Hawkins confided with me—

"All I got 'o say is I hope somethin' happens 'at gives him a —— good excuse for gettin' hurt, bad."

Williams had conveyed to Hawkins, to Malua, to all of them, that there would be more trouble than they wanted if any of them quarreled or shot before he thought there was need of it.

I don't know how much what Hawkins told him of the Portuguese had to do with what followed. Carp Taylor and Davenant were down near the landing. Williams started down.

I still tagged along, trying to tell him what I had learned in Grahame's room and breaking the story up, perhaps incoherently. But he listened, though he did not seem to. There had been so much else to tell that I do not believe I got in all my evidence against Carp Taylor.

Williams went toward the landing. By the time he could get there the Germans would be almost within rifle-shot, for he went out of his way to pass the Portuguese.

They stopped firing. They stopped looking at Germans, too, as he came near.

He went up to the mean fellow, apparently the overseer, that had met me when I came ashore.

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Without warning, without explanation, Williams said—

"Drop those guns."

Five faces stared at him in sullen stupidity. The overseer sneered and jerked up the muzzle of his rifle threateningly—though perhaps defensively.

He started to say something with oaths in it, and Williams killed him. With his left hand Williams caught the barrel of the rifle. With the blow of his right hand a knife flashed. That was all, except that he wheeled, the gun club-like in one hand and the knife, its sheen reddened, in the other.

"Drop them!" he said, not loudly but with sudden tense fury, meaning it—meaning multifold times more than his words; and showing what he meant by the glare of his eyes, the strange poise of his body that appeared to be leaning against an invisible leash.

The rifles fell.

"Go over there—any place;" he made a short impatient gesture.

Five men shuffled off, their faces almost between their shoulders, staring in dull fear—as such stupid fellows might stare at the devil who cast them away, not thinking they were worth the coal it would take to make them squirm; perhaps aware that if they were smelted down they would have no souls.

Our party did not lack for rifles. Two Samoans came down and smashed these. Williams bent across his knee the one he held, threw it aside, and went on. I stumbled along after him.

CARP TAYLOR was saying—

"Now le's look here, Mr. Williams——"

Williams looked toward him, and confusion descended upon Carp Taylor's thick tongue.

Williams had come to the landing and seemingly ignored Taylor and Davenant, whom he passed close by as he approached the *Sally Martin's* men. But I knew by the merest tilt of his head that he had not been ignoring them.

It wouldn't take much to cause me to say that he had hoped either or both of them would make a move. Surely he expected it. Perhaps they knew that he did.

He had said to his uneasy crew that they could do as they pleased—come with him, or face the Germans with uplifted arms and the best explanation that suggested itself to tell why they had let Captain Lumholtz be imposed upon at Lelela.

Cockney George shifted about from one foot to the other indecisively; Raulson came near to yielding to his impulse; but only Raikes, little rat of a fellow, his one eye glistening, stepped out. Williams' glance swept him from the feet to the one eye.

"All right, Raikes," he said indifferently and jerked a thumb toward me.

Raikes came and stood by me. Nervously, with something of an air of apology, he said:

"I guess hell ain't far off—but I don't want 'o go from no Dutch yard-arm. An' I never meant Hawkins no harm, er you. 'Cept at Lelela—an' I was drunk. Say, what was the matter with them guns that time?"

Just then Carp Taylor had stepped up and called Hurricane Williams Mr. Williams.

What Taylor was trying to do without giving offense was to point out that Williams did not have even the remotest of a fighting chance. About all he succeeded in doing, in his watchfulness against giving offense, was to protest that he would do anything on earth to help Williams. His idea of helping was to stay there and intercede with the Germans.

"And you?"

Williams abruptly drove the question at Davenant.

Davenant's forehead swiftly became red; and I suppose his face flushed. It was not easy to be sure through the blackness of his beard.

His manner was unflustered, but what could he say? Unless he were exceedingly cautious he might not live to see Williams outnumbered, hemmed in and caught.

Taylor had no doubt told him some things about Williams' reputation, and how it was scarcely exaggerated; and he had seen what happened up the beach among the Portuguese. So he was, though he did not greatly show it, afraid of that tigerish figure. In empty tones he said:

"I've misjudged you. My quarrel is with Grahame. When the Germans get here I'll tell them you——"

Davenant was making a strong but rather late effort to play his favorite rôle of friend to one whom he wished damned.

I have sometimes suspected Williams of

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humor, though he never laughed. In few words and short sentences, a bit ambiguous, he said no.

It would be dangerous for them to meet the Germans. They should come with him. He would watch over them. The Germans were likely to be waspishly angry.

Davenant, very erect, and Carp Taylor, shambling dejectedly, moved along the landing and up toward the trees, where the little party watched the coming of six times their number.

THE Germans landed. To attack they would have to rush across some three hundred yards of open ground. Off to the right the blacks, their yells mingled with the howls of dogs that persisted in threatening the savages, must have caused Captain Lumholtz, whose dumpy figure could be plainly seen—Red Shaylor was with him—to wonder if a host of wild men could not be moved against him. The Germans quickly and roughly took in hand the *Sally Martin's* men; but they showed no eagerness to get far from their boats.

That was really good judgment. Lumholtz knew nothing of the lay of Dakaru—a difficulty that would presently be overcome by flanking, scouting and skirmishing.

The *Sally Martin's* men would perhaps readily if not eagerly show willingness to tell him how few were in Williams' party. The Portuguese, who had moved off down the beach, no doubt helplessly wondering what had become of Grahame, would soon be offering him information.

HAWKINS did not notice the Germans. His eyes were at Carp Taylor's back; and he kept up a monotone of rumbling abuse at Taylor, who was uncomfortably trying not to appear to be paying attention.

He made many harsh remarks about Taylor's progenitors, his courage, his honesty, his personal appearance, his hopes of heaven.

Williams told him to shut up, not with words, but with a tap, a blow, on the shoulder and a glance.

In what Hawkins thought was a whisper he complained to me of the sad fate which made his big body a bulwark so to speak, and certainly a German target, for that vicious, treacherous, dirty, cowardly nigger-stealer.

"An', Red-Top," he said with strained accents of wo, "I got scars on my back yet!"

A man with a white flag on a rifle-barrel left the Germans and came up from the beach toward us.

Carp Taylor said that he would go down and meet him and find out what the thrice-doubly-cursed Germans wanted.

"The two of us," Williams answered, dropping his revolver into my hand as he stood up from where he had been squatting like a native.

"G'ory ——," said Raikes shrilly, "them Dutchers 'll pot 'im!"

OF COURSE I can tell only what I saw, and it happened at a distance—almost two hundred yards away. The bearer of the white flag seemed a little uneasy at two men coming, and he stopped short of half-way.

Williams and Taylor went down to him. Presently there was a puff of smoke and a report from the rifle which bore the white flag. But the rifle was pointed skyward. Williams, himself unarmed except for a knife, knew something of how forgetful people could be when keeping even a truce with him; and he had made the man pull the trigger just to see what happened.

I do not believe treachery was intended. The messenger seems to have been sent out to impress Grahame—probably he mistook Carp Taylor for Grahame—and carried word that it would be futile and dangerous to harbor Hurricane Williams. Perhaps the fellow, selected because he could speak English pretty well, exaggerated with cunning intent the punishment that had come upon Lelela, suggesting, if not threatening, something similar for Dakaru.

What Williams answered I do not know. He might repeat words some one else had said, but he would never quote himself.

What sign or gesture or glance may have passed between the messenger and Carp Taylor would be impossible to say—and what happened was over almost before we could move a foot. It was so unexpected that I could not get it into my slow brains that the thing I saw was actually taking place.

For one of the few times in his life Williams was probably caught unaware, unprepared. Carp Taylor jumped his back, pinning his arms, at the same time bellowing for help. He needed it.

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The man with the white flag took a moment too long to reverse his rifle and lift it as a club; for before he struck, Carp Taylor lay twisting, awkward even in death, on the sand with a knife buried in his belly. Williams crouched, awaiting the fall of the blow.

The blow did not fall. The man stumbled backward, frantically reversing his rifle again and getting under the sanctuary of his white flag.

I saw Williams' arm go out in a gesture. He was probably sending the man back to the Germans on the beach.

Williams turned and came rapidly but unhurriedly toward us. He did not glance behind him. From where we were we could see all of the Germans staring, almost gaping, at him. They too had heard of the quickness and savagery of Hurricane Williams, and were somewhat impressed by what they had seen.

However, they respected their own flag. No shots were fired.

As he came up the eyes of all of us were upon his face.

"Lelela's burned. Taulemeito's killed," he said, and nothing more, but the gesture backward toward the beach told by whom.

Raikes cursed feverishly. Hawkins' big lumpish face wore an almost ludicrous expression of rage and pain. Lelela had been the nearest to heaven that men such as he and I could hope for.

Samoans are emotional as children except at times when emotion is expected. Those of pride, and few of them in the early days were without it—they have since been civilized—are stoical in shame and tragedy.

For some moments their faces were strained resolutely. They were silent. Then Malua, as if to be done with the mockery of stoicism, flung up his rifle and yelled to the Germans—demanding why they delayed in coming to meet their death.

The cannibals in the distance caught up the yell and redoubled it. The other Samoans, brandishing rifles, cried their anger. Dakaru seemed the home of fiends.

The Germans, though they intended to do something all right, were still undecided. All the time in the world was theirs. Williams was cut off from the sea.

Officers were talking with Portuguese and pointing this way and that. Nobody was to slip through their fingers at Dakaru.

WILLIAMS had looked about two or three times before he asked where Davenant had gone.

Raikes spoke up, saying he had seen Davenant just edging off a while before toward the house. Williams looked toward the beach, then steadily toward the house.

"McGuire," he said.

I left the tree-trunk against which I was leaning and followed him.

He went rapidly up the road and through the grilled gates. I have often thought that he must have had a sense of danger that more or less served him at all times.

In the grounds we met Laulai and Nolopu running with horror on their faces. They were wildly seeking help. I don't know what they said or tried to say. Cries reached us from inside the house and told all that my ears could hear.

We leaped into the hall and ran with something like barefoot noiselessness down the matted floor.

"You shall not touch him —— Don't! —— Don't —— You shall not! —— Oh, God! —— I'll kill you —— You! —— Oh, oh! Awh-o!——"

We were through the open door and into the room.

Williams stopped short and stood still. He, whose way it was to strike before a breath could be drawn, stopped motionless. But his body was braced in that strange poise from which he could move with a swiftness, a force incredible.

We had come too late—or rather he had come too late, for I never felt more helpless, more worthless, more bitterly meager—to stay the hand of Davenant.

Though there was much else to see, to notice, to horrify, I saw that his hand held the knife that belonged to Dula; and that vibrantly shocked me. That seemed wanton irony, malicious, on the part of God—for Dula, breast upward, arms outflung, lay backward across the bed—across the form of Grahame. She had not known how unwakable his sleep, and had died defending his death-chilled body from a knife-thrust.

Eunice crouched on the floor, moaning. The side of her delicate face was blackened by a blow. She was not yet out of her daze.

And Hurricane Williams made no move. Like a statue he stood, a statue with living eyes. His eyes were on Davenant.

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A red stain appeared on the coverlet, and grew and grew, reaching out with crimson figuration as if cryptically writing in blood some message that explained it all.

Dula's face was in repose, as the faces often are of those who die, even violently, in a way worthy of God's mercy.

And Hurricane Williams stood motionless.

I don't know what Davenant thought or felt, though I stared at him. I will not say that he showed great terror. Perhaps his terror was too great to be shown; or maybe he was nerved by fear.

He was afraid; and it was not because two men had come. I am sure of that, for all Davenant saw was Williams' face.

Not a word was spoken. Not a sound was made excepting the muffled sobbing of Eunice, who had fallen forward, and excepting the slow drip-drip-drip from the edge of the bed.

And yet Williams made no move.

In a sort of hypnotic terror I edged leaningly forward and looked into his face. Great God! He was smiling. If the line on those closed, twisted lips could possibly have been anything else I would not call it a smile.

That interminable waiting, that implacable slowness, that steady glare of eyes, that smile like a grotesque crack that had come by some hard blow into the face of a figure of bronze, at last made Davenant flinch. He took a slow step backward.

Then Williams moved slightly forward; his hands were empty.

Davenant, no doubt unconsciously, edged backward again and turned his wrist, putting the knife in a position to lunge, to thrust straight out, fencer-like. The straight thrust is a difficult blow to evade; the most deadly in a skilled hand.

Williams, inch by inch, went on.

He was not moving warily, but by some queer reversal of his character was drawing out the ritual of death-dealing. I was to remember afterward that it was the first time I had ever seen Hurricane Williams vengeful. All other times had been fights to have work done or life saved.

And by one of the enigmatic twists of his brain he did not seem to hold malice against any person that struck merely at his life. Maybe when one has dropped, neck-bound, through a gallows trap one learns the strange wisdom of the dead, which is to have no bitterness about ousting the soul from its house of clay unless that soul belongs to some one dearly regarded.

Inch by inch he moved.

Davenant's hand trembled, but the hands of men of great courage may tremble as the fight's beginning is delayed. But he moved backward till he could go no farther. He was against the wall. He drew himself closely against it.

I will not say that he shrank against it. But when he felt the wall to his back and knew retreat was over, a sudden look much like a gleam of terror spread out in his eyes. Yet he was a man as full of evilness and wicked deeds as the devil could wish, and the devil must have sustained him with something akin to hope; for he did not break.

Williams, implacably, almost imperceptibly, leaned nearer, closer.

Davenant had bared his teeth the better to breathe. They gleamed, but there was no deadly white smile about it. They were clenched—but shook a little.

The end came; Davenant took a strainedly deep breath and lunged, his arm outthrust.

Williams, empty-handed, was not an arm's length away, and—I can't tell how it happened. I can tell only what was done. All was over in less time than a thimbleful of sand would trickle through one's fingers.

Across Williams' shoulder I saw the mingling of incredulous surprize and agony on Davenant's face and heard the snap of his broken forearm. Williams had caught his wrist, twisted the arm over—inside of the wrist up—and broke it at the elbow as he might have broken a stick.

On that instant his hands, almost too swift to be seen, reached Davenant's head and caught it vice-like—a hand to the chin, a hand gripping the back of his head. Rising to tiptoes, Williams bent back the head, jerked sidewise with the full weight of his strength; and the neck snapped—a dull, sickening, crack. It had happened so suddenly that not even frightened lips could have formed themselves for prayer.

Williams threw the body from him, threw it by the grip he still had on the head. The body fell across the chest. Jerking, flopping, it lay across the chest where there were many bottles of strong Jamaica rum—all the treasure of Grahame's that Davenant

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had come seeking as profit for his vengeance.

I would have given my right arm, cut from the shoulder, for all the rum I needed, more than breath, at that moment; but with hands to eyes I stumbled from the room, shuddering.

CHAPTER XVII

MY STORY is told. Other things happened, of course; and there was much fighting; many people died. Hurricane Williams again took the web out of the hands of the Fates and snarled it up to serve his own ends. Luck did not help him.

If Captain Lumholtz and his officers had not, as naval officers were always eager to do, stayed on shore and taken up quarters in Grahame's house, Williams would, I believe, have boarded the gunboat. And who shall say that he would have failed? Not I. He never failed where the risk of his own life and his inordinate daring could win.

Certainly the Germans, skirmishing upward from the beach, driving us back, almost outflanking our few numbers, had reason to believe themselves as safe behind the walls of Grahame's garden as on their own ship.

How many of them died that afternoon I do not know. That night they were bunched at the gates, and they patrolled the grounds and surrounded the house while their officers dined well and drank.

The *Friedrich* came in close to the landing so her guns covered the beach between the house and the water. All was safe as intelligent precaution could make it.

We drew back late that afternoon, firing as we went. On the morrow we could expect to be hunted down, crushed out by weight of numbers. Our little party was thinned. When night came two Samoans had been killed, another wounded. And that was not all.

Hawkins had an arm made useless and cursed his thigh, where another bullet lay in the flesh so that he could hardly drag himself. But drag himself he did. Whenever he could find prop or rest he shot with his one hand. He enviously damned me because I was too thin, he said, to be a target.

He had the stuff within him that doesn't give way. He fought as hard as he could, though one arm was useless and a leg was worse than useless. Though he expected, as I did too, death and hell on the morrow, he jeered at the men he shot, cursed those he missed.

Requiscat in pace; may he rest in peace. The snowfall of years since then has buried him.

Raikes died. Shaylor and a half-dozen skirmishers came almost upon our rear. For seconds the fighting was hand to hand. Whether Raikes, with a sudden gallantry leaped to take the blow of the cutlas that came at Williams or sprang blindly away from the swipe of a rifle at his own head and dodged into the cutlas, I shall not try to say.

He died like a hero in that his life saved probably the life of another. No doubt in the Great Judgment-Hall God won't be too inquisitive about what was courage and what was cowardice.

Anyway Hawkins pronounced a blessing, a blessing though well filled with oaths, over the little twisted body, its head sliced, the one eye opened still with a kind of impudent stare. Perhaps as life fled that one eye caught a glimpse of the mysteries into which the dead go, and was unimpressed.

I thought that Shaylor died. I shot him. Hawkins, having two good arms then, threw a rifle hurtling and hit him—and nearly hit Williams, too. Williams, turning with his rifle club-like, smote Shaylor; then stooped and picked the cutlas from his hand.

I did not see Shaylor move again. But some years afterward I heard of a Red Shaylor, a seaman, a big fellow, muchly scarred from temple to chest. Perhaps the Fates, wholly unaware that Williams had snatched him from the sea when the *Roanoke* sank, had made no further provision for Shaylor's death, so that he went on living, living, living, indefinitely.

NIGHT came and we rested. That is, Hawkins and I rested. I felt futile, akin to disgrace, because I did not have a scratch on my body. It was as if the people who had fought with us did not think me worthy of even a blow, of the waste of time it took to put a bead on to a rifle.

Williams rested not at all; and the Samoans lay out in the darkness, watching. He went alone through the blackness to the

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cannibals; and before he came back a full moon raised itself in the cloudless sky as if pale with horror at the things men do.

How he met, and what he said to, that pack of cannibals I do not know; but it probably had something to do with the renewed terrific din and clamor they set up. They slipped down through the groves and burned the outbuildings; they danced and shrieked in the far-flung glare of the fires and dashed leapingly through the moonlight from shadow to shadow.

But they remained in the same whereabouts. They did not attack anybody, though the Germans at first were alarmed and fired at them, but did not move out to come well within the range.

Then the fear of the Germans quieted somewhat, but not the noise; and the sailors watched, fascinated. They grouped themselves to look, from a comfortable distance, on that sight; and many of those stationed on guard and patrol gave their attention chiefly to staring in the direction of the cannibals, who kept tirelessly at their spectacle.

Then Williams and Malua and six Samoans went down to the wall about Grahame's house; and some inattentive sentries found their throats crushed stranglingly. Perhaps more of them died than would have, had not the man with the white flag lied when he told that Taulemeito was dead.

The entrances were choked with guards. Patrols were in the grounds. Sentries were about and at the doors.

But walls may be scaled; patrols evaded in the shadows and from behind bushes; and doors are not the only means of entering a large, rambling house banked with shrubs and vines. Windows in hot countries are always wide, and netting screen is easily cut.

Captain Lumholtz had dined well with two of his officers; and they drank—drank so much that perhaps they did not believe their eyes when dark figures began to materialize within the shadows at the outer edge of the lamps in the large room. Anyway it was true—what their eyes told them; and Captain Lumholtz and his next in command respected the order for silence, as well-trained officers should.

Their younger and more impulsive companion leaped up. No doubt he felt, a little alcoholically, that there are times when it is better to die than to keep still.

He died, and without breaking the silence, Hurricane Williams, as if going from a spring-board, caught him — hands to throat — and one of the Samoans struck across his head.

Later the officer of the guard came in to report. And he did not go out. He too stayed to sit in meditative silence and await the morning.

WITH the dawn Laulai and Nopolu, sent by Williams, came searching for us. And we, with Hawkins leaning heavily on the three of us, and a sapling crutch as well—his leg stiff but his heart high—went down among the baffled, glowering sailors of the *Friedrich*.

Orders were orders even in those days to Germans in uniform; and Captain Lumholtz dearly loved his stout pudgy body and the life that dwelt in that dumpy habitation. His fellow officers shared a similar affection for themselves. They were much pained because Hurricane Williams would not take their words to let him sail unmolested from Dakaru.

He said that he would kill them the moment he or any of his party was attacked; that he would kill them the instant they refused to carry out his orders. And they believed him.

It is true the sailors did not realize until too late to have done anything courageous—though mutinous—just what the situation was. Group after group was called into the house and ordered by their own captain to lay down their arms. Every last man remaining on the *Friedrich* was called off, together with the astonished crew of the *Sally Martin*, who had been put on board, prisoners.

Williams had said—

"If a shot is fired from her as the boats go out to board her, you die."

Captain Lumholtz protested, and he even might have been willing to die had he known what was to be sent out in those boats. Cannibals. They boarded the undefended, the deserted gunboat and they wrecked her. They smashed everything that was smashable. They hacked the masts, but did not cut them down. That was too much like work. They cut the rigging—that was more like fun.

By special instructions they went into the engine-room and twisted and battered everything that in their childish, unscientific

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way could be twisted and battered. They wrecked the *Friedrich* and they looted her. Williams was remembering Lelela and German vengeance there.

It would be many long hard weeks before she could take the sea again. And in the dull, dry archives of the German Admiralty is the sober, unsmiling report that on one quiet day off Dakaru the *Friedrich* was disabled by a hurricane.

WILLIAMS took toll of the *Friedrich's* pride for what she did, and claimed to have done, at Lelela. We went out in the late afternoon of that great day. It was our hour, our day; it was the *Friedrich's* men in the *Friedrich's* boats that warped us out.

But we did not go in the *Sally Martin*. She was shattered. However, the *Fijiian Maid* and the smaller, swifter, and as stanch little *Eunice* were brought alongside of her and supplies transferred.

Our crew worked in a kind of feverish exaltation. They, remembering cuffs and blows and abuse, jeered the Germans.

The blacks worked too. They were going home. Hurricane Williams had promised.

The richness of Grahame's trees and fields was raided. Chickens and pigs fairly overran the *Fijiian Maid*. All was helter-skelter of course; but what was needed was put on board, and that was the thing of importance.

And when the German sailors, sweating, furious, helpless, had towed us out, we who had been on the *Sally Martin*, by way of thanks and reward gave, them a cheer—of a kind—as we cast off. And, ungrateful to be alive, they answered not at all.

WILLIAMS, on board the *Fijiian Maid*, and all canvas out, with his cannibals and the Samoans, led the way westward. And we followed on the *Eunice*, sails shortened and little to do except to talk and remember.

As the sun fell away, burning the lazy clouds that banked the east, filling them with strange fires, and night threw up her impalpable cooling incense to foretell her coming, the elation of the day died out in me. Down in the cabin a girl of wonderful golden hair and fragile features—her cheek now bruised, her eyes black underneath and swollen—sobbed, disconsolate, and shivered, though about her shoulders I had thrown a heavy black cloak lined with crimson.

What the future had for her none could guess. She, who knew nothing of the world, least of all.*

Hawkins, who refused to be put to bed, sat on deck with his arm bound across his breast and his stiff leg propped up. And he was silent.

Perhaps he too was thinking of the large grave, dug under the shadow of an orange-tree, where the sweet-scented blossoms would fall; dug near the row of fire-tipped poinsettias whose burning flowers reached from their leafless stems like flames magically turned motionless, and not far from the towering figs where the multicolored cockatoos preened and scolded. Into that grave we had laid father and daughter, each wrapped about in clean *tappa* cloth, unspotted, fragrant from the press of sandalwood.

And though there were the flat stolid faces of Germans all about, staring, I had tried to say a prayer—aloud. God in His infinite wisdom knew how greatly those poor passion-ridden bodies were in need of long rest. And He knew what was in my heart.

But only He knew what was in the heart of Hurricane Williams—though it was in keeping with his fate, with the irony that burned him and turned to ashes almost all that he did, for him to have loved her at the moment Davenant struck. But, his face inscrutably tense, he stared down into that coffinless hole where Dula lay by her father, and said nothing, then or afterward.

Their faces were covered with the white cloth as if to offer some courteous little protection from the black, moist dirt that was pushed back in upon them. There were many new graves at Dakaru, but none were near enough to disturb the rest of Dula and her father. . . .

"Look — look! oh, look!" Hawkins cried with an uneasy thrill of awe as he thrust his hand toward the eastern sky. I looked. And there, coming through the clouds, was a great full moon, red as if it had been splashed with blood.

* What Williams eventually did do was to rerig and rename the *Fijiian Maid* and sell her. He gave the money and Eunice Grahame, together with a letter telling the facts, into the keeping of a wealthy young Englishman by the name of Trevalyan, who was cruising in the Carolines. I heard that love at last disposed of her ill-fortune. Trevalyan married her.

THE END

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THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

ONE of our old-timer comrades tells us something about a long shot at the Adobe Wall fight:

Austin, Colorado.

I read an article by Louis G. Mullikin about killing an Indian one and one-half miles at the Adobe Wall fight. The facts are that a bunch of Indians were having a powwow just a little over 1,700 yards up on a hill and Wm. Dixon knew the range and took a shot at the crowd and killed a young Comanche chief. I have forgotten his name. The shot was fired from a Sharps big fifty, 800 grains of lead. Don't know how much black powder. That was the old big fifty; the new ones came out in 1876, shot 800 grains of lead—that was the new big fifty. They could kill over a mile. Wm. Dixon died in Oklahoma about eight years ago. Do you know where I could get the story by Alfred Henry Lewis?—JAS. W. STELL (Moccasin Jim*).

*That was the name I went by in the '70's on the Buffalo Range.

THIS letter gets me where I live. I commend it to such of our Australian comrades as have been worried by such Americans as claim for this country all the glory of having "won the war." This letter does not even touch upon that point, but it says something else that I wish all Australians and all other foreigners could get clearly in their minds.

Still more, I wish that all Americans could get it clearly in their minds. It would comfort them and give them strength.

THE letter is far from a preachy letter but what it says at the end is something far too big to be passed by as merely interesting.

The point I mean is this: The *heart* of America is sound. We—and the foreigners—look at our dirty politicians, at fiddling, shifty, corrupt "statesmen" and public officials, at greedy, callous business men, the careless rich, the sullen trouble-maker, at the graft among us, at classes struggling selfishly, at the mistakes our nation makes within and without its territorial limits, and naturally things look ugly and hard and cheap and disgusting. But the *heart* of America is sound.

If there is much to be ashamed of, yet there is vastly more to stir our pride and to strengthen our confidence in the future. If our house needs cleaning, still it is a house that is *worth* cleaning.

OUR national reputation would be a better one if it were the many, instead of the few, who guide the national destiny. For the mass of the American people are sound in heart. Despite all careless adulteration, despite all false surface ideals, despite all our sins and stupidities, despite all outward signs, despite everything, still there is that in the mass of us that, when driven, rises to say "Thus far and no farther."

I do not mean Fourth of July patriotism. Nor is it a question of morals. It is, I think, too fundamental for easy definition. Perhaps its elements are manliness and independence of spirit and brain; a reliance on facts, combined with a susceptibility to ideals; an instinct of cleanness, and a belief in fair play. Whatever it is, it is there. Buried very deep sometimes, but there.

THAT is our best insurance that what changes must be made in our political and economic conditions will be made by reasonable methods, not by an orgy of force. And I wish that many of those who are belatedly sending out propaganda to combat the Bolshevist propaganda could understand this thing. If they did, they would send out less frothy, sickening stuff, fewer platitudinous appeals to Fourth of July patriotism. They would see that to beat the Bolshevist propaganda they must use propaganda that is more sound, more true, more fair, more open, more based on common sense—would see that cheap and slushy appeals, ignorance, lies, and distortion and suppression of facts are things that should be left entirely to the Bolshevists, since the user of them is surely doomed in the end.

They would see, too, that if a cause is to make permanent headway in the heart

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of the American people it must not only be presented on a horse-sense basis but must also play fair even with an opponent that does not play fair.

YESTERDAY I read a full newspaper page of utter slush, one of a series using paid advertising space for propaganda against Bolshevism. That particular mess of pap was devoted solely to picturing the very, very horrible rich man who secretly supports the Bolshevist movement with his check-book. If the Bolshevists can turn out anything more cheaply sensational, more sickeningly sentimental, more wholly based on a tawdry appeal to brainless emotion, I sincerely hope they will. For nothing could hurt Bolshevisn more in the long run. That page of slush was so bad that I almost wondered whether the Bolshevists might not be paying for it in order to discredit the sound cause it purported to support. Certainly the writers of it, whoever they may be, have never had even a glimpse of the real heart of America if they expect it to respond to that kind of piffle and slobber.

The case of our democracy against Bolshevism is sound and sane and strong. It is only injured by using pap and piffle.

I HADN'T meant to talk so much. Let's have the letter.

It brings up a question for discussion, a question I wonder hasn't come up before—"Where does the West begin?"

Battle Creek, Michigan.

I have a few questions to ask and a few observations to pen and perhaps I had better start the discussion by telling something about myself first.

I WAS born in San Francisco and spent the first seventeen years of my life in California and the neighboring State of Oregon. At seventeen I went East to attend school and remained there until my graduation from a New England university at the age of twenty-two. The next two years found me in the Northwest States (Oregon and Washington) engaged in the lumber business. A wanderlust which had been mine since the days of my first long pants led me to sever my connection with the lumber firm and, with half the savings of two and one half years, I went East and embarked for Europe with the intention of traveling that continent à la Bayard Taylor. I did, although my travels were not attended with the literary success which was deservedly his. But I wrote and walked and worked for eighteen months in Europe. I vagabonded from Andalusia, Spain, to Moscow, Russia, and then, retracing my steps as far as Prussian Silesia, journeyed south through Hungary and the Balkans, finally landing at Constantinople.

From that city I continued my vagabond journey to Greece, etc., and in Alexandria went broke. This rather unhappy condition gave me the opportunity of learning how it feels to work one's passage on a British (or any other) steamer, but, as such ship was bound for England and not for the East, I was compensated for my hardships by finally arriving in a country whose language (Oh! blessed tie of language!) was my own. The next four months I spent in the tight little isle, going no further afield from London than the Cheviot Hills, an excursion which embraced a three weeks' tramping in a country whose rural loveliness can not be beaten anywhere in the world.

UPON my return to my native land, Boston being the port which gave me my first glimpse of America after my nearly two years' absence, I made up my mind to *know* the United States as well as my tramp had made me know not a few of the European countries, and with this intention planted firmly in my mind I started a vagabond journey from the Hub to the Golden Gate. The season was late Spring and I had twenty-five dollars in my pocket. I arrived in the Golden State in the early Autumn, sans the twenty-five dollars but with an accumulation of knowledge anent my native country (which few save tramps and commerical travelers have) and a wanderlust which has been my constant companion ever since. Oh! the sweetness of an American Summer in our Northern States! If one wants to *know* America—and to know her is to love her better—let him "hoof it" for a month through any of our States and especially any one of the North Central States in June or September.

SINCE that far off Summer I have been in every State of the Union, save two. I have traveled on foot, the "box car" route, by *le chemin de fer* as a *bona fide* passenger and—but why go on? Suffice to say that I *know* America, know her as only a fellow who has been of the genus hobo American can. I know her great heart, know her inherent soundness, know the differences which mark her various sections. It is concerning this last that I wish to intrude some questions and pen some observations. New York City people assume that the West begins at an imaginary line running from Buffalo to Pittsburgh and extends from that imaginary line clear to the Pacific Ocean. Others believe that Chicago is the dividing point between the East and West. Still others say Kansas City is the first really Western city. Can *Adventure* readers settle the question, "Where does the West begin?" Also is the Pacific Ocean the ending of the West or are the Cascade and Sierra Nevada Mountains? California is not Western in the same sense as North Dakota, is it?

AND is New Mexico Western or Southern? Also how many distinct sections has the United States in the opinion of your readers? There have been many writers who have written minutely on the personality of various American cities, but few who have attempted a discussion of the personality of the various States, and yet (the world over) cities are ever more similar to each other than are the communities which comprise them. We label vast communities Southern, Northern, Western, but forget that such definitions of sections are at best vague.

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For instance take the most distinct section of our country—the South—and compare the old and aristocratic (I use the word in the best sense) State of Virginia with the young and mighty State of Texas. There is small similarity between the two save an aversion to the negro as a race (not as an individual).

New England, as the smallest distinct section, might be said to have more or less uniform characteristics, but there is very little similarity between industrial Rhode Island and rural Maine. And the people are different, as a hundred-mile walk in both those States would quickly disclose.

Take the States of Ohio and Indiana, twin States as far as the maps go, and a walk through them would disclose many differences between the people of these two splendid Mid-West (or is it Mid-East?) States.

OUR novels, for the most part, deal with the rural Far West or New York City. New York City, being ultra feminine, is usually pictured as a place where unusually beautiful girls abound and where masculine virtue is wanting. Every New York novel has a precocious and amazingly beautiful heroine and a few pursuing males (of the Continental type, mustaches, etc.) and the wealthiest or least unworthy wins her. Result, from the Appalachian Mountains to the Pacific Ocean the bulk of people believe New York men are weak, silly and "sissy," and that New York City is made up of elderly men and elderly young men (if I may use such a term) who pursue innocent and unusually beautiful "girls." New England novels are usually pale and lifeless affairs picturing New Englanders as they might have been once but certainly are not now. The Western novels are complimentary enough to both hero and heroine, but many of them are a little too strong on that "where a man's a man" stuff.

I am a Westerner, a big fellow standing six feet two inches and weighing (after a good supper) about two hundred pounds, but I know that all our *men* are not found in the West and that moral, mental, and physical bigness is not the product of any particular section but is common to our soil as a whole. I know there are fops in New York City, but there are more fops in the pages of novels having a New York setting than are to be found on Broadway and Fifth Avenue. Thank goodness, *Adventure* trades with novelists whose brain children are not emasculated creatures of a disordered fancy but he-man and she-woman, the like of which can be found in any section of the United States, from Maine to California. All of your stories are not of the same caliber, of course, but the vast majority of them paint the real men and women of this country and see the best side of American life, and believe me that best side is second to none in the world.

AND now for my observations, observations which have been gleaned from a topsy-turvy, routs about life in this and other lands, observations which have been perhaps rounded out by my almost three years in the Canadian Army (June, 1916, to Jan., 1919) and twenty-two months in France. And I want to say here that our brothers to the North are men in every sense of that word; big, wholesome, splendid fellows who are working out their destiny (and a great destiny it will be, too) in a way befitting their splendid land and their splendid stock. Wherever I am in the future, in my own country or in the far-flung spaces of the world, the Canadian will always seem my brother because of my knowledge of him, because I was a part of his country, aye, a part of him, during the grand, sad days which have now passed into history.

I can not answer the question "Where does the West begin?" which I have put to your readers. If the words of the beautiful poem are true—"Where men's hearts grow a little kinder," then I should say it starts anywhere five miles beyond the limits of the larger cities, for take it from an itinerant farm-hand, a hobo (if you will), the heart of rural America is very kind and that applies to New England as well as the South and far West. We all have our favorite States, and mine without a moment's hesitation are California and Oregon, but as far as kindness (among the rural people) is concerned it would be a toss-up between any two of the forty-eight.

I THINK that of all the States, Kentucky, Virginia and California have the most distinct personalities, or perhaps it would be better to say that in those States there seems to be developed among the people the greatest degree of State consciousness, if I may use such a term. Texas, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and a large number of the Southern States have this to a degree also, and the young States of the Northwest and the States of the industrial East seem to have the least State consciousness.

I believe that central and western New York belong to what is termed the Middle West rather than to the East—Buffalo surely is as Western (?) as Cleveland, and the few remaining New York cities southwest of Buffalo seem more Western. Maine, except the extreme southern tip, is radically different from all other New England States, or so I have always found. Florida is far less Southern (as we understand the term) than any of her near neighbors, indeed in many ways less Southern than Maryland.

WHAT foolish observations these! And yet as I have traveled about the country I have tried to taste the different flavors of the various sections and States, to understand their separate personalities, to interpret their peculiarities, and if one doubts that such exist I advise him to take a three-hundred-mile tramp through any two of them and then write his impressions.

The (many times) weary pilgrimages of my youth have netted me a knowledge of America (the United States) which I could not have got in any other way, and this knowledge of my own country has given me such a love for her and such a belief in her ultimate destiny that all the Bolshevists in the world could not change my ardor for, and belief in, this country and her ultimate destiny. The heart of America is sound and that inherent soundness will tide her over these troublesome times. And if any Camp-Fire reader wants to know and respect and love and believe more firmly than ever in the United States, let him take up his knapsack and walking-stick and tramp the highways and the by-ways of this mighty land. Go in the early Spring or the harvest time, start in the East or West or South or North, tramp anywhere from two hundred to eight hundred miles, and you will learn the real America, and mayhap see her soul—ANDREW MACCRUM.

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A QUERY at Camp-Fire by Frank Huston as to where some of the old Western scouts were buried brought him the following from James W. Stell, an old-timer who was interested in getting into touch with Uncle Frank. Our Camp-Fire gatherings not only bring to light many bits of interesting information concerning the Old West but incidentally forge quite a few links in a chain that serves to connect many of the scattered old-timers with one another.

Austin, Colo.

Saw your notice in *Adventure*, requesting the burial places of old scouts. Here are a few that I know about.

Jim Bridger died in Westport, Mo., in the early 70s, Texas Jack in Leadville, Colo., in 1879, Spotted Jack in Reynolds, Texas, in 1877, Capt. Chas. Christie in Monte Vista, Colo., Oct., 1916, Hurricane Bill in Tombstone. Ariz., about 1880, Jack Stillwell in Cody, Wyo., about 1881. I will find out about more and let you know. Where did you run the range? I used to hunt buffalo out of Dodge City, Kansas, in the early 70s.

I would like to hear from you. We may have reminiscences in common, which would be of mutual interest.

Yours for the olden times.—JAS. STELL (Moccasin Jim).

WORD from our old comrade Major Robert W. Foran, of our writers' brigade and one of the founders of the Chicago Chapter of the Adventurers' Club. You'll remember his occasional letters, also, during his long service in the Mesopotamian campaign. Back in November he wrote from London that he had been given further extension of sick leave until December first and expected then to be permanently invalided out of the British Army as unfit.

Fortunately, while his physical condition puts some limit upon climatic conditions, he is still able to do a man's work and is getting more fit instead of less so. Perhaps we shall be hearing from him later in Mesopotamia, South Africa or his old stamping ground, British East. Also he's getting back into the writing game and we may be having some more stories from him.

In any case, here's good luck to him.

BECAUSE it would not, for various reasons, fit just right into our schedule at times when we were starting a new serial, "Wulfhere" has been in our safe since 1918 and it was then that Mr. Higginson gave us the following by way of introducing himself to Camp-Fire according to our custom, for neither he nor I foresaw that so much time would elapse before the story saw print. What he says, however, is no less interesting for the delay:

Port Dalhousie, Ontario, Canada.

THERE is an old saying, "He may lie boldly who comes from afar." Now in speaking of my life as I am asked to do, I might tell of hair-raising adventures, miraculous escapes from certain death, perilous trips and voyages in southern climes or amid Arctic icebergs, of dangers among giant Patagonians or African pigmies, etc., etc., but I do not speak of these things because in the first place space here would not permit, and in the second place both my conscience and my profession would protest loudly against any such juggling with facts. Unfortunately, or fortunately as the case may be, my life has contained more ventures than adventures. I have even tried my hand at "perpetual motion," but gave that up when my father informed me that I could as soon hope to raise myself off the floor by taking hold of the seat of my trousers. My venture into the realm of invention produced several interesting things that would have been great successes *if*—but they all went the way of the perpetual motion machine, so I gave up this line of business and turned my hand to short story writing. I wrote a dozen or more, and came very near to having one of them published once, but didn't have the twenty-six dollars required by the editor, who must have been as hard up as I was. Then I settled down to write a long story, finished it, and had it accepted by ADVENTURE.

SO FAR I have told very little of my life. There is not much to tell. I was born some few years ago in a small town with a big name in Eastern Ontario, Canada. When a boy at school I received a silver medal for good conduct; I was always rather ashamed of that distinction, I don't quite know why. When eighteen years of age I went to college in Toronto. I could tell of some gruesome adventures while there, in my Freshman year. Finally I graduated, in '98, with honors, but all in the class who passed at all passed with honors, so there was nothing to brag about. With an M. A. degree and two or three years more of training I took up my profession which I still practise with indifferent success. I married about twelve or thirteen years ago—I've forgotten the date. That was another venture that proved a success. I have three children, two girls and a boy. Eight years ago I entered the 20th Halton Regiment and hold a captaincy in it. It is through no fault of mine that I have not yet been overseas.

IN MY story "Wulfhere," I have tried to describe events as they took place in the stirring Saxon times in England when Penda the Strong strove to make himself master of the whole land, and to set up again the old heathen gods in the place of the religion of Christ. He was a man of wonderful parts, this Penda, and his son Wulfhere inherited all his good gifts while he lacked his father's evil qualities. The main facts of the story are gathered from Bede's History, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, both written in Saxon times, and from Geoffrey of Monmouth, Florence of Worcester, William of Malmsbury, Henry of Huntingdon, who wrote in the 12th century.

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Green in his "History of the English People" speaks of Penda as "a man of whom we would willingly know more." I have endeavored in this narrative to give some account of this Mercian king who made things so lively for England in his day.

HE WAS indeed a marvelous man. Beginning as a mere chief of a petty tribe on the upper Trent, he rose gradually in power through sheer ability and strength of purpose, till before his death he was the most powerful and most feared of all the kings of his time in England. First he subdued the smaller kingdoms about him; then, uniting with Cadwallo of Wales, he defeated and slew Edwin the great king of Northumbria. Oswald, Edwin's successor, he defeated and slew at Mesafeld, and he expelled Kenwal of Wessex from his kingdom. Ecgric, Sigebert, and Anna, successive kings of East Anglia, fell before him and their whole race was practically exterminated. Penda stood supreme in England. Then at Winwedfield Penda himself was slain, and his kingdom crumbled till only one small province, that of the Middle-Angles left in the hands of Peada, Penda's son, was all that remained of the once mighty kingdom of Mercia.

The task of rebuilding his father's fallen house was the task that Wulfhere, Penda's third son, undertook, and with the help of his father's great captains, Immin, Eafa and Eadbert, so completely accomplished.

IT IS the story chiefly of Wulfhere that I try here to tell. Most of the incidents in the tale are true, if the old Chronicles are to be believed. Most of the persons mentioned, too, are actual historical characters, *viz.*, Penda and Burgenhild his mother, and Cyneswithe his wife; Eadbert, Immin and Eafa his captains; Edwin, Osric, Eanfrith, Oswald, and Oswy of Northumbria; Sigebert, Ecgric and Anna of the East Angles; Elgiva or Ermengild, Wulfhere's wife; Aidan also, and Brian and Cadwallo, and Pellitus the Wizard, and others.

The tale is at least as true to history as "Ivanhoe" or "Hereward the Wake" or "Harold." If there is much war and slaughter in the story, let the reader remember those were strenuous times. In Penda's days not much else of importance happened.—A. B. HIGGINSON.

A HAND-SHAKE for this old-timer comrade who after all these years at last comes forward from his listening seat at Camp-Fire to entertain us with a brief outline of his eventful life. Maybe some of you who live in Sacramento might like to look him up and get acquainted at first hand. We'll forward a letter addressed in our care.

Sacramento, California.

I've been for years—since 1913—a reader of *Adventure* and now after all this time I'm going to join the dear friends around the Camp-Fire.

A FEW words of introduction may be in order. I am sixty-two years young—born February 24, 1857, of Irish-American parents. I've wandered pretty well all over this old sphere from Vladivostok to Bombay and Singapore, Manilla, Batavia (Java), fairly well all over Australia and the many islands included in that name. Besides being even more at home in our own good old U. S. A. and our full grown neighbor—Canada, besides considerable in old Mexico.

Was for nineteen months one of the thousands employed on the Panama Canal—and "take it from me, she's some ditch."

Have been lost in the West Australian bush; was one of the crew of the steamer *Queen* when she burned at sea, six hundred miles off Talinisok Point, Oregon. I've been lost three days on a burned over prairie in Montana; and have "put in" three years as lieutenant of North Borneo. Native Constabulary.

EVEN at my present age I feel the return of the wanderlust. At present I'm a mere porter in a restaurant, and though I'm not foolish enough to think myself any better than my job, still I can but long sometimes for the good old days that were.

Like most in whom the wanderlust burns strongest, I've saved practically nothing—my home a lodging-house room; all my belongings could be contained in a small trunk and a suit-case.

I've neither wife, chick nor child to worry over, or to worry over me, and am likely to "hit the trail" again any day. I long for the free out-of-doors again, to know more that I'm free to come and go as I please and where I please.—JAMES D. MOORE.

P. S. Just a few words afterthought! Would like to meet at the Camp-Fire some one who was acquainted with Western Kansas—say Wallace, Sheridan, Logan or Grove counties, during the late '70's and early '80's.

I lived at Grinnell, Grove Co., Kansas, from '79 to 1886, and when we moved there the "God's Acre" contained thirty-six graves; the occupants of same all died with their boots on except one woman and two babies.

SOME very interesting advice on snake-bites, from a California physician. As stated before, any seemingly intelligent remedy is eligible to a hearing at Camp-Fire, but no responsibility is assumed for any of them. It's up to each of us to listen and form his own judgment. There is, however, at least one big point for this remedy—it could be tried in situations where it was impossible to get drugs.

California.

In reading Camp-Fire I see some controversy *re* snake-bite treatments, and can not refrain from butting in. All the treatments given are useful, as is that recommended by Mr. Ditmars in his "Poisonous Reptiles, etc.," of the desert. But most of the measures are unnecessary, confusing and tend to make the excitable loose time.

THE following case was reported by me, and published in the *Clinical Notes Journal* of the American Medical Association about five years ago. I forget the date fully. At present all I wish to give is the principle involved.

A child about six years of age was bitten by a Mississippi ground rattler (Sistrurus crotalidae) on toes. Could see only one fang puncture. Made four or five incisions through skin surrounding

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puncture. Put on tourniquet handsbreadth above knee. Put on poultice of wet cotton into which had been mixed paste made of powdered boric acid and water. Every fifteen minutes for six hours tourniquet was loosened till leg resumed healthy pink appearance (usually in about twenty seconds) after which tourniquet was tightened enough to stop arterial circulation for another fifteen minutes.

At end of six hours removed poultice. The toe I had incised (the one showing the fang-mark) was normal in appearance except for incisions which were clean and clear. Toe next was twice normal size, inflamed, and on one side showed a black patch beneath the gray skin. In the center of the skin over black patch was a puncture. On breaking skin the black patch proved to be an area of digested tissue (flesh) about the consistency of rotted meat, and when scooped out with spoon left a hemispherical depression. In short, that toe had been punctured by the snake fang and had been overlooked so far as local treatment was concerned. As evidenced by the very sharp line of demarkation between the digested flesh and inflamed flesh, it was evident, however, that the spread and absorption of the venom had been completely checked as soon as the tourniquet was applied on the thigh, and that thereafter the venom exerted its cytolytic and toxic action entirely locally.

In this case I had the interesting experience of seeing two venom injections of the same venom of same strength, in the same individual at same time and under same conditions, but one was treated both with tourniquet and locally, while one was untreated except by tourniquet. The toxic or venom of the sistrurus is, weight for weight, more deadly than the venom of the rattle-snake (Crotalus horridus). At the end of eight hours after the bite was received the child was running about the yard, apparently no worse for his adventure. The accident occurred in my yard and tourniquet was applied within four minutes of the bite.

FROM the foregoing, as well as from reading up a good deal on the actual evidence in the recorded investigations of snake-bite, I am here to state that the essential in the treatment is to get the tourniquet on at once, and tight enough. The rest is refinement of technique. If one likes permanganate, strychnin, nitroglycerin, iodin, ammonia, digitalis, whisky, aromatic spirits of ammonia, tobacco-juice, gunpowder, saltpeter, etc., and doesn't take too much or too many of them at once, I can see no objection to them, and they undoubtedly calm the minds of that class which demands that everything possible be done. But they are unessential. If the tourniquet is properly applied, it will stop the spread and action of injected or applied permanganate as certainly as it stops the spread and action of the venom. And it does it at once. It is a law of physics that when two solutions of crystallines are brought in contact with each other, or are separated only by a colloid, then there is a flow of fluid from the solution of lesser specific gravity into the solution of greater specific gravity. For this reason in all local intoxications, from felons to snake-bites, I believe in and have practised with uniform success incising the skin freely and then applying a poultice of greater specific gravity than the blood. In the case of this boy boric acid and the salt crystaloid were used for this purpose, and at the end of six hours all the venom had been drawn through the incisions into the poultice, as evidenced by the non-imflamed condition of the treated puncture. Common table salt, epsom salts, Glauber's salts, sal-hepatica, sugar, bichloride of mercury, or any other crystaloid would have been equally effective if used in sufficient strength of concentration and kept wet—not moist, but wet. *Vide* elementary physics, chapters on "Osmosis."

The above of course applies to snake-bites of the extremities, or to over 98 per cent of all bites. Bites of the body are best treated by permanganate injected into the fang marks at once, and by heart stimulants, and free purgation. They are serious however treated.

If the fang happens to have pierced a large vein and injected a fair dose of venom directly into the blood stream, prayer is about as effective a treatment as any, and is seldom very satisfactory in its efficacy. The patient is usually dead in thirty or forty minutes unless antivenom can be administered, of course. The injection of specific antivenom does away with necessity of all other treatment, but is rarely possible.

NOW the above is off my chest and I feel better. You may use it in any way you choose, but I prefer not to have my name appear in print. If you wish to refer any private inquiries to me, or give any name to private inquirers, do so.

I spend six months out of most years in the hills or deserts, on sea or stream, and believe you will be doing my less specifically informed fellow time-killers and chance-takers a service by telling them how simple the treatment of venom may be: (1) Tourniquet tight enough to prevent bleeding when skin is cut, kept tight for fifteen minutes, then loosened till blood flows, then tightened again, and repeat for six hours. (2) Thick poultice of table salt, over incision through fang-marks. That's all.— ——— ———.

Camp-Fire is not the place for advertising peace-time drives, but the country, especially since the war, owes a big debt to the Salvation Army and I think you'll agree to an exception in this one case.

The Salvationists are now most of them back at their peace-time posts. The appeal that they are to make to the country at large May 1 to 10 is for the sinews of that warfare which the Salvation Army has waged without ceasing since its inception—the warfare against wickedness, poverty, sickness and distress.—A. S. H.

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LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

AMONG clippings filed away some ten years ago I found the following from the *Literary Digest* of Jan. 29, 1910:

MORAL INSTRUCTION IN JAPAN

"While the teaching of ethics or morals in our public schools is largely defeated by warring denominations who fear it will be turned to sectarian ends, Japan makes such instruction as much a part of the school course as arithmetic or geography. So we are told by Baron Dairoku Kikuchi, president of the Imperial University of Kyoto, and formerly Minister of Education, in his new book on 'Japanese Education,' published in London. It seems that the little Japanese tots begin studying morals as soon as they enter school and continue it throughout their educational course. The regulations provide that they shall study 'such virtues as filial piety and obedience to elders, affection and friendship, frugality and industry, modesty, fidelity, courage, etc.,' and 'some of the duties toward the State and Society.' "

There is quite a difference between religion and ethics and if the various sectarians who are fearful of any moral instruction in schools would worry less about sectarian matters and more about either religion or ethics, the world would profit a good deal. But the significant thing in the above clipping is that "some of the duties toward the State and Society" are taught. They are not taught by our school system.

SOME people say citizenship and democracy can't be taught in the schools. Some parents teach them in the home and most parents could do so if they care to sufficiently; why can't teachers teach them? We "can't change human nature," but we can shape it. Otherwise why not give up shaping your children's morals and ethics at all? There would be danger that the kind of democracy and citizenship taught might be given a turn one way or another that would favor some beliefs over others, but that danger is not half so great as the present method of letting the next generation of Americans grow up with only a "gutter" education in citizenship and democracy.

And there is no need of incurring the former danger. Only the fundamentals, on which practically all Americans agree, if they think about the subject at all, would be taught.

CAN'T change human nature!" Does any one mean to say that if you took a boy and made clear to him what democracy really is, what obligations and responsibilities his own individual citizenship will entail, what is the exact position and real duty of any citizen holding public office of any kind, why loyalty to the nation is more important than loyalty to party, why "graft" in public affairs is a worse crime than stealing from an individual, and other lessons of that kind, do you mean to say that he would not grow up into, not necessarily a good citizen, but certainly a better or a less bad citizen than he would have made if we had let him grow up (as we *do* let him grow up) with the general idea that nation, State, county and city are things apart from him and, maybe, to be preyed upon if you get the chance; that the most that can be expected of him as a citizen is to vote honestly, keep the laws or most of them and serve in war if needed; that graft is something to joke about, and all the rest of the ignorance and misinformation that at present constitutes the education of American children in citizenship?

You could, and you know you could, make that boy a better citizen. Perhaps only a little better, perhaps a great deal better. At least he would have been told what *is* right and what *is* wrong, which is more than he's generally told at present.

Multiply that boy or girl by fifteen or twenty million and you've done something very big indeed for your country.

Why don't we do it?—A. S. H.

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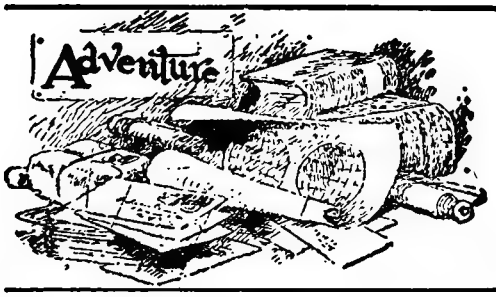

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one.* They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: First Oct., Mid-Nov., First Dec., 1918; First Jan., Mid-Jan., Mid-Feb., First Mar., 1919; First Apr., 1919, to Mid-Jan., 1920.—Address D. G. MAXCY, Apt. E, 3902 Calumet Ave., Chicago, Ill.

WILL BUY: First Oct., Mid-Oct., First Nov., 1919.—Address CHARLES MURRAY, 270 Regina St., Quebec, Canada.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 996 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
LARRY ST. JOHN, 1101 Kimball B'ld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering southeastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries. Part 6
H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America. Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile; geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A., University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N. M. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports, manufacturing.

26. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia
MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, tansport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

32. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shot-guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shot-Guns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg, Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

FOR ARMY, NAVY OR MARINE CORPS

What the Government is doing for discharged soldiers and sailors. Facts not opinions given. No questions answered involving criticism or bestowing praise or blame. Enclose stamped addressed envelope. Address—SERVICE, THE HOME SECTOR, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City, New York.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 5 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

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Firearms for the Tropics

IT IS the wise man who gives close attention to his selection of firearms before trailing back into the Central American jungle—or any other country where his life may depend on swift, straight shooting. Our expert on rifles and small arms names the battery he would pack into the land of the tapir and jaguar, and tells why his choice is good:

Question:—"I would appreciate information concerning the 1895 Winchester .30 caliber, both sporting rifle and carbine; also the .45-90 Winchester, model 1886. Both .45-90-300 and .45-82-405 cartridges; and the .45-70 Winchester, model 1886, using 500 or 405 grain bullets and the 300 grain.

I am planning a trip to Central America and can't decide on a rifle. I want one that will stand hard use and fire a cartridge of the size easily obtained; also that I can get spare parts for.

Edgar Young in *Adventure* recently recommended the following battery:

.30-30 Winchester or Marlin carbine.
.22 repeater
.38 Smith & Wesson.

I couldn't consider a Marlin, but like the Winchester .30-30 pretty well. I have, however, known the .30-30 and .38-55, 1894 model, to get loose, and have seen two .30-30s that would fire at half-cock.

At present I'm using a .30 Army (.30-40 Krag) and a model "R" sporting Ross .303 caliber. The Krag bolt action is slow, while my Ross often refuses to eject broken cartridges that swell and jam. Being a straight pull, it lacks leverage enough to force them out. Therefore I wouldn't think of taking the Ross.

I am a bit prejudiced against the high-powered rifle, for I've recently seen, as a soldier in France, a lot of men, drilled by small Mauser, Lee-Enfield and Springfield balls, who still had plenty of fight left in them. They would have been knocked cold by a big 405 grain slug.

How do high-powers of .30, .303 and similar calibers, using soft-point bullets, compare with 405 and 500 grain slugs shot from .45-70 or .45-90 rifles?

Do you think the Savage models will stand as much hard wear as Winchesters? A hammerless, lever-action, does not look good to me.

Would you consider the .32 special Winchester big enough for Central American game? It seems to me a bit light for its caliber.

Personally I do not like .38 caliber revolvers. When a man is so close to his object that he's using a six-gun he wants something that will kill at the first shot. What cartridges are best for the revolver—.44 or .45? I have used the .45, Government model, 1911, considerably in the army and have one now, but I don't like it. I prefer the old single-action, but can't decide between the .44 and .45, and whether I want a 5½ or 7½ inch barrel. Which would be better?

I have always used a 35 grain black powder charge and a 250 grain bullet but have heard that 40 grain black and 260 grains lead is far superior. Can you give me any dope on this? Also on reloading cartridges for this gun?

What do you consider the best sight? I want one that will not catch in the holster.

If I have a pack horse I should prefer a shotgun to a .22 rifle for game. I would have a double-barrel 10-gage with one barrel cylinder-bored to use shells loaded with a single round ball."—A. WESTCOTT, North Castine, Me.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—Here is the way I would outfit as far as the firearms are concerned.

Winchester rifle, model 1886, extra light weight, caliber .45-70 Takedown, with Lyman Ivory bead front, and receiver rear sight. Colt S. A. Army, caliber .45, 52½ inch barrel, wood grips. Double-barrel hammerless shotgun, standard boring, any good make, with Silver's recoil pad.

You will find the old .45-.70 a very reliable cartridge, and one whose bullet in either 330, 350, 405 or 500 grain loadings will not be as readily deflected by brush as the smaller high-power bullets, as I understand shooting must occasionally be done through tickets down there. And using Hi-Velocity leads the trajectory won't be high enough to cause misses at the distances usually fired.

Of course, were you going into mountainous country, you would need something on the order of the '06 ammunition, but as the work is apt to be at shorter ranges down in Central American lands, I think the big bullets of the .45 will be strong medicine for all you will need it for. I am told jaguar and tapir are the largest game found there.

I don't wish to cast any aspersions on the high-power rifles, as they are fine for the longer shots, but for two hundred yards give me the old-timer, with modern loading. All the rifles you mentioned are as good as the best hunter will ever need, with the possible exception of the .38-55, but they are no better than the old .45 for close work.

Use the old .45 Colt you mentioned, and with the black powder load you mention. It will be satisfactory for all you will ever require for a six-gun. I don't favor a revolver bored for rifle cartridges, and too much of the powder burns outside the barrel, giving a terrific report, and not enough power, is my experience with such weapons. Get a bit of copper and have a gunsmith braze it on your front sight, when you can work it down with emery paper to the proper size and height to suit you, is my advice on the sight matter. You can buy the wood grips from either Colts or Bannerman of New York City.

As to the shotgun loading; you can use the round ball loads with perfect safety in a full choke gun, as they are made with perfect allowance for choke. After a little practise I find that I can shoot well enough with them to be sure of a deer at a hundred yards, and that looks good to me. I have, with my .20 Winchester, put three out of five in a four-inch target at twenty-five yards, and an eight-inch at fifty. Penetration and shocking power are fearful, I find. I have a crotch sight on the barrel of my gun, and find it helps it even with the shot shell. Be sure to get some good make of gun, like Parker, Smith, Ithaca, Baker, Lefever or Fox. A Winchester or Remington pump-gun is my choice, but you have mentioned double barrel, so I refer to them.

I think that you do well to reject the .22 repeater, for was there ever a rifle of that size that wouldn't rust in a wet climate? A shotgun is far surer, and with a few ball shells in your pocket, you are equipped for big game as well as small. Get Lyman

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or Marble ivory sights on your shot-gun, whichever you select. They are a help in lining it up on a mark.

In regard to reloading, you will be able to secure good results, but if I were you I would practise a good deal of it at home first. I recommend the Ideal or Winchester reloading tools, and the Ideal powder measure, which your local dealer in arms can secure for you. I use the Du Pont, No. 80 powder in my Savage .32-40 rifle, and the No. 3 pistol powder in my six-shooter, a .44 S. & W., S. A. *Follow the directions, exactly*, and you will get splendid results. I reload all my ammunition for the revolver and rifle, as well as the shot-gun, and am positive I prefer the ones I make to factory loading, both for accuracy and economy.

Always use Marble rods for cleaning your guns, and Marbles' oil or Remoil to preserve them against rust, which I am told is fierce down there. Get good leather cases for the guns, and a good flap-covered holster for the revolver, and oil both well with neatsfoot oil, not any mineral oil. Marbles rust ropes should also be used, to protect the barrels.

One thing more; don't be afraid to practise on quick snap-shooting at moving objects, as this comes in mighty handy when an animal is moving through trees, brush, etc. I think using the revolver at short range only is exactly correct. While I have done good work at long range with the revolver, I don't recommend others to depend on much game in the pot with the six-gun.

As to the various rifle actions, I candidly don't see much to choose between any of them. The Model '94 Winchester, while it gets so loose you can play a tune on it, is nevertheless safe under any conditions, as it is built for hard use and plenty of it. My old .32 Special, while very shaky, is still very strong and very reliable. I like the new Remington pump action also, but have a Savage for my own best gun.

To Build a Mountain Hut

NOT EVERY camper cares to pack along a heavy tent. And there's no need for doing so. Here is a chance to learn how the Osage Indian builds his hut and the way to throw up a snug lean-to:

Question:—"I am anxious to go into the mountains and live for a time and would like your advice on the best places for camping and hunting in your territory. Also, what is the best sort of abode and how should it be built?"—JAMES E. FLEMING, Colchester, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—The mountains in my territory vary all the way from barren rocks in desert regions to great slopes that are covered with thick forests. All the way from huge sections where water can only be found by the skilled or Indians to other huge tracts where every cañon and draw has a stream. All the way from where the only life consists of tiny animals like the coney and a few birds, to where deer, bear, wolves, lynx, bobcat, coyote, wolverine, cougar, doves, pigeons, quail, grouse, and thousands of song birds are found. It is a wide variation.

You ask for the best places in the mountains to go. There are about a million best places. Go into Plumas, Shasta, Trinity or Alpine counties and you will find good hunting in the season and lots of trout. You can find the same in Siskiyou or many other counties. Alpine and old Trinity are as good as one can find for wild places, where game and fish abound. Shasta and Glenn have more wild fowl, for they have lakes that swarm with ducks and geese every Fall.

Perhaps you want to build a shelter instead of taking a tent. If you camp where you can get tules or long grass, set up two rows of light, green poles eight feet apart. Stick them well into ground and have at least six on each side. Bring tops together and wrap them around each other, making fast with cord or withe. You can twist your own cord from the grass if you care to take the time. Lash poles on each side and over top of frame about a foot apart; very light ones. Close up one end this way and narrow front opening to door-size by a stake at each side and horizontal sticks lashed on. Then gather grass or tules, make into bunches and tie along poles, with butts up, each layer lapping over the one below. Completed you have an Osage Indian hut that makes a comfortable camp, with a fireplace in front of the door. Clear a large space there and lay up stones to make fireplace with high back and open toward hut. Clear away everything burnable all around fire for six feet or more.

If you do not want to go to so much trouble, build a lean-to. A pair of forked stakes with pole across, other poles running back to ground, sticks set up at sides and all covered with thick coat of pine tips. This does very well for a Summer camp. There are a dozen different huts you can build. Hang food out of reach of animals, by wires if possible. Pack a rifle of some kind and don't get scared. Observe the game laws.

Make a bed of pine tips. First form a frame of small logs, 6 inch. Inside this stick pine tips in rows, tips to rear, butts down. Make as thick a layer as logs will retain. Cover with blanket and flop.

Send to Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for copy of "Handbook for Campers in National Forests." A splendid thing to have.

Don't try to go into a wild section without a guide at first or you may never get out. In case you get lost, try and remember which way you started out from camp and don't get rattled. Follow the slope of mountains that pitch toward a stream, then follow the stream. It will lead you to some sort of camp or home if you stick to it.

Florida Fruit Farms

LIVE in a country before you decide definitely to make it your home. Inspect land carefully before you buy it. This is especially true if you mean to settle in Florida:

Question:—"I am taking advantage of the opportunity offered to request some information relative to the vicinity of Tampa, Florida. Any assistance you may care to render will be gratefully received.

1. As to the growing of citrus fruits, could a person without experience but with plenty of energy and some capital succeed at this work in time?

2. What is a reasonable figure of profit per acre from citrus and grape culture?

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3. Is the climate at Tampa humid in Summer, and are there many mosquitoes?

4. Is hunting and fishing good in this vicinity or must I go into the interior for game, and up or down the coast for good salt-water fishing?

5. I note from the advertising columns of the Tampa *Tribune* a large number of advertisements to dispose of property.

Would this indicate dissatisfaction with the place as a place to live?

What is your candid opinion in this regard?"—W. J. Cooley, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—1. I believe that a man with plenty of energy and a little capital could succeed at the business of growing citrus fruits. Some knowledge of fruit-growing is necessary, of course, but an energetic man could soon pick up enough to carry him.

2. As to a reasonable figure of profit, most fruit-growers make it, judging from my observations. A full-grown grove of ten acres should make its owner from $2,000 to $4,000 per year, net. Such a grove would cost around $10,000. Many buy such groves with about $3,000 cash and make the grove itself pay for the rest. There is, of course, a chance to take. There may be an "off" year, and once in a long time there is a killing freeze. And it costs a good deal to keep a grove up to a first-class bearing condition, which sometimes hurts the man with small capital.

3. The humidity around Tampa runs not very much higher than that of Chicago. Florida Summers, many Northerners claim, are better than Northern Summers. But they are very much longer in Florida, running from about April first to November first. Ordinarily, the mosquitoes are not very bothersome, except in the vicinity of water or marshes. In Florida we use a screen fine enough to keep them out of the house. I have been annoyed more by mosquitoes in Tennessee than in Florida.

4. Hunting is not good in the vicinity of Tampa; it never is good around a large town. There is not very good fresh-water fishing around Tampa, though many salt-water fish are taken from the bay and river there. But this is not as good a place for salt-water fishing, in my opinion, as some other places on the west coast.

5. Advertisements of properties for sale would denote more or less dissatisfaction with them, but this need not necessarily mean much so far as you are concerned. There are any number of reasons for selling properties. Some, naturally, sell because they want to buy better properties.

I believe you will find better grove land, a better climate, and better water in central Florida, around Lakeland or Orlando, for instance, than on the west coast. I know you will find better hunting and fishing in central Florida than on either coast.

I have noticed that people either like Florida very much or don't like it at all. I advise you to see the country, and make all investigations, before you put money into anything down here. Real estate here is a great big game.

Lumber Camp Ballads

THOSE quaint, descriptive "Come-All-Ye's" of the timber country are so little known that we print the following. Perhaps some of you who have lived in the big camps can tell the inquirer more about them, or help him complete his collection:

Question:—"I would like to secure information regarding the ballads or trail songs of the Northern lumberjacks. If it is possible, will you send me the information which will enable me to secure about one hundred of these songs?"—Alfred C. Klosterhaus, Capital University, Columbus, Ohio.

Answer, by Mr. Moore:—The only songs that I have ever heard in lumber camps which might come under the name of "trail songs" are what are known to us as "Come-All-Ye's." These songs, which are made up by the shantymen, usually on some exploit the year before, or something that happened in the past, all begin with "Come all ye." Then follows "jolly shantymen," or some similar term of camp life, which may string out into a dozen verses and mention the names of the parties in the tale.

The airs are very simple, moderately low. There is always a certain amount of interest to these songs; they are very popular with the men. But—a hundred of them? I'm afraid you have undertaken a big job. Of course, there is this crum of comfort: Songs sung in Quebec woods may be different from songs sung in Northern Ontario, Michigan, British Columbia, the Maine timber lands, etc. What you will have to do is to get in touch with the real lumberjacks of these different parts and make known your wants.

If you have never seen a "Come all ye" in print, and for the moment I may be excused if I say I never did, I am going to give the first three verses from memory of one I heard in Quebec. It goes like this:

Come all ye jolly shantymen,
  And listen unto me,
And I'll tell you a story
  Quite simple and free;
I'll tell you a story,
  As fine as I know,
Of a fine lot of men
  Some two years ago.

We hired with Fitzmaurice,
  An agent for Booth,
To go up the Black River
  So far, far away.
To go up the Black River,
  So far, far away,
To the old Conroy limits
  For to cut the hay.

We packed up our duds,
  On the first of July;
Ab Hoover, George Pearson,
  Bill Prentiss and I,
Down to the landing,
  Our luggage did take.
We took the old schooner
  And sailed up the lake.

The tale goes on to tell how, after cutting the hay, wild hay, they went on to prepare the camps for the loggers. Follows the Winter's doings, a good word for the boss, the foreman, etc.

But one hears but few of these personal reminiscences. "Goo Goo Eyes," "We'd Better Bide Awee," "The Gypsy's Warning," "The Rose of

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Tralee," "The Land o' the Leal," these are the songs that one is more apt to hear in the sleep-camps at night.

Now that the war is over, and our warriors have gone back to the camps, new songs will be sung and enjoyed. A year ago last Fall I met a French-Canadian lumberjack going back to the camps and he was singing a little thing he heard in Paris. It was a lively, catchy piece. I asked him to sing it again. He said he couldn't sing it in English. I told him to go ahead and sing it anyway. Afterward he told me that song was "The Little Hotel Mouse," and he very kindly translated it for me. I have an idea that "The Little Hotel Mouse" has been heard often where my French-Canadian friend works.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

VANDENBURG, THOMAS. J. R. B. would like to hear from you. I am in Waterbury. Please write.—Address L. T., 395, care of *Adventure.*

KROH, H. D. Last seen in Canal Zone in 1915. Home was in Phœnix, Arizona. Have important news for him. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address L. T., 394, care *Adventure.*

CURRY, JAS. F., or WHITSON, J. LEE, at San Diego, Cal., about 1916. Your old friend would like to hear from you. Everything O.K.—Address JOS. C. FINCH, 412 S. Conception St., Mobile, Ala.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

STREMPLE, H. E. Brother. Sailor on some U. S. ship on Pacific Coast. Needed at home badly. Former manager anxious to have him on his old job.—Address MRS. HELEN BOWMAN, 608 E. 105th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

MILLS, JOSEPH. Father. Last heard from in Houston, Texas. Your son would like to hear from you. Have news for you. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address HAROLD B. MILLS, care of *Adventure.*

LEE, D. F. Frank. Last heard of in Colorado Springs, Colo., in June, 1918. Was leaving for Rocky Ford, Colo. No trace since. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address A. W. LEE, Box 124, Monroe, Wash.

EKLUND, NELLIE DE CLOUD. Last heard of in Wyoming and Nebraska in 1918. Nellie, do you remember the free life, fresh air and the canter after the cattle? Write to me for auld lang syne.—Address "GUNPOWDER," L. T., 393, care of *Adventure.*

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

JONES, RALPH. Last heard of in Santa Barbara, Cal. May have gone to Alaska in 1913. Was born in New Canaan, Conn. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address MICHAEL J. JONES, 80 West 40th St., New York City.

BRICE, EDWARD CLIFTON. Age about fifty-four years. Last seen in West Philadelphia, Pa., in 1904. Was a very well-known business man. Will appreciate any information concerning him, his parents or family.—Address NORMAN BRICE, 803 Madison St., Tampa, Fla.

PERRY, JIM. Brother. Have important information for you. Communciate at once with Ada.—Address MISS ADA PERRY, Box 491, Plainfield, N. J.

KROMER, RAYMOND. Formerly of Pueblo and Buena Vista, Colo. Enlisted in Navy at Pueblo. Last heard of in Oregon. Write.—Address DONALD L. MACGINNIS, Buena Vista, Colo.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HEDDELSON, THOMAS. From somewhere in Montana. Saw him last at Base Hospital 27, Angers, France. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY HOLDEN, 925 W. Dayton St., Madison, Wis.

GREEN, JAMES. Brother. Trapper and hunter. Last heard from in Alaska. Please write your sister. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MRS. MARGARET GROW, Coquille City, Oregon.

WÖBBER, GEORGE AND ADOLF. Brothers. Born in Westerwana, Hadeln County, North Germany. Ages about thirty-eight and forty years. Any information as to their whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address FERDINAND WÖBBER, 13 West 15th St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

VESTLE. First name unknown. Was shipmate of mine at Harvard Radio School, Cambridge, Mass. Is a soap salesman and lives in or near Des Moines, Iowa. Any information will be appreciated.—Address W. C. ZIEGLER, 620 North Fifth St., Springfield, Ill.

LYNCH, EDDIE. Shipmate of mine in Harvard Radio School, Cambridge, Mass. Last heard of in Naval Aviation, Pensacola, Fla. Lives either in St. Louis, Mo., or near there. Any information will be appreciated—Address W. C. ZIEGLER, 620 North Fifth St., Springfield, Ill.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

COLFAR, JOHN. His sister, Annie, would like to hear from him. Went to United States from Liverpool, England, about ten years ago. Was with the Yates Shipping Co. of Liverpool. Father died in 1915; mother died in 1917 in Derbyshire, England.—Address MRS. R. A. ROBERTS, 14 Morley Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

CAMPBELL, JENNER S. Brother. Last heard of in Wichita, Kansas, in 1912. Probably railroading, as he has generally followed that occupation. Height five feet nine inches, weight 180 pounds, complexion ruddy, brown hair and hazel eyes.—Address OLIN R. CAMPBELL, Rangoon, Barbour Co., West Va.

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MULLIN, MICHAEL. Left St. Jerome, Quebec, about thirty-five years ago for lumber camps. Last heard from twenty years ago in Minnesota. Fifty-seven years of age, six feet tall, weighs about two hundred pounds. He is a good violinist. His brother, Barney, would be very grateful for any information.—Address M. G. MEEHAN, 2084 De Laroche St., Montreal, Canada.

HICOK, PARKE. Tramped with me from San Francisco to New Orleans, La., and then on steamer *Eastern Star* to Rio. Five feet seven inches tall, weight 140 pounds, light hair. Last seen in Bloomington, Ill., Sept. 10, 1919. Write your old pal.—Address RALPH PIERSON, Sigma Chi Fraternity House, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N. H.

THOMAS, MRS. S. S. Mother. Last heard of in Tampa, Fla. Husband was in business in Tampa until about 1898, when he died. About 1900 Mrs. Thomas was married again. Name of husband unknown to me. Understood several years ago she was a widow. Any information will be appreciated by her son.—Address A. E. MADDOX, Kirby Hotel, Muncie, Ind.

DONNEGAN, CHARLIE. Father. Saw him and mother while in State Home at Denver, Colo., about fifteen years ago. Drove past in a buggy but did not recognize me. Before then he was in the vehicle business across the big viaduct in Pueblo, Colo. Must be forty years of age now. Mother's name was Cora. Reported killed in an explosion in Pueblo, but do not believe it. Would like to hear from them or any relatives of mine.—Address MORRIS DONNEGAN, 341 West St., New York City.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First April or Mid-April issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

AHEARN, Arthur; Baker, William H.; Bunch, Ray; Caslin, Jack; Cridland, Arthur; Curran, John; Felingham, Fred L.; Firman, Kenton W.; Graham, Mrs. Annie; Hansen, Einar; Harris, Joe; Hayes, Frank F.; Hoffman, Wm.; Hurlbut, William; Keith, John M.; Marchant, F.; Mathews, Louis P.; 116th Overseas Draft Canadian M. T. Outfit; Parker, Gus; Peoples, Chas.; Pleasants, Robert T.; Schroeder, Paul; Seibert, Charles E.; Settle, Samuel; Stone, Eleanor K.; Stremple, H. E.; Walters, Clifton B.; Wylie, Gertrude.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Byron Chisholm; Wm. S. Hilles; A. B. Paradis; G. E. Hungerford; E. E. S. Atkins; A. Gaylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; J. Dunn; J. Higmon; E. Cunningham; Dennis F. Crolly; L. E. Patten.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

ALLISON, CORP. JAMES T.; Beaton, G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bryson, Clarence F.; Mr. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; Carr, Fred; Coles, Bobby; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Garson, Ed.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Hines, Joseph; Koltzau, John; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Harry; Lafler, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lee, Dr. C.; Lee, Capt. Harry; Lee, Dr. William R.; "Lonely Jock"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva L.; Madsen, Sgt. E. B.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Parott, D. C.; Raymond, C. E.; Rich, Bob; Rundle, Merrill G.; Scott, James F.; Swan, George F.; Taylor, Jim; Thomas, C. L.; Tripp, Edward; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Wetherell, Corp. D. E.; Williams, Raymond J.; Williams, W. P.; Wood, Basil D., S 177284; 439; L. T. 348; J. C. H.; W. S.-X. V.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you. Address E. F. BRACE, care of *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-JUNE ISSUE

Ten stories, including a complete novel and a complete novelette, comprise our next issue. Here are a few words about them:

THE MOTHER OF THE MOON *By Arthur O. Friel*
A mae da lua—the Mother of the Moon; that is the name which the Brazilians give to the jungle-owl whose call resembles the wails of a man dying in agony and despair. But *a mae da lua* that lived up *Ygarape do Inferno*—Creek of Hell—who shall say what her call portended?

BLACKMAIL *By Gordon Young*
All *Don Everhard* wants is to be let alone to practise his profession of gambling in peace and quiet. But he's always being interrupted—as in this case.

INTRIGUE A Complete Novelette *By Robert J. Pearsall*
Kiangsi Province is ready for revolt. Pitted against the sinister society of Ko Lao Hui are but two white men, whose wit and courage must be sufficient to avert a cataclysm that, once started, will mean wo to millions—possibly the downfall of the entire white race.

ADAM'S EARTH A Complete Novel *By George Brydges Rodney*
Many are they who search through the Southwest for the fabled "Mother Lode," which is said to pump gold through the veins of the Rocky Mountains as the heart pumps blood through the veins of the prospector. And of all those who engage in the search none meet with so many dangers and with so great a measure of success as the party that follow *Tom Hardin's* leadership.

MISSIONARY BILL *By E. E. Harriman*
Officially he is a quartermaster in the U. S. Navy. Unofficially he is a missionary for the U. S. A.

WULFHERE A Five-Part Story Part II *By A. B. Higginson*
Wulfhere fares into the wild mountains of Wales to seek better fortune than he can hope to find under the pagan banners of *King Penda*, who is gathering a great force to smite the Angles.

AT THE RAINBOW'S END *By William M. McCoy*
In the irrigated-ranch country the pot of gold At the Rainbow's End lies in a ditch of water. And men like *Charles Stone* will go far to get a good water-supply.

THE PEARLS OF OLD KING POPITOU *By Lee Hooper*
"Pretty fair—for a king. He ain't got but five or six wives and he don't stay drunk no longer than his gin lasts." Thus "*Square-Face Pete*," who's been kicked off every island in the South Seas, characterizes *Old King Popitou*.

THE FREIGHT OF FORTUNE *By Samuel Alexander White*
Who is *Clement Beauchamp* to defy alone of all traders the power of Canada's giant Northwest Fur Company? The trial of strength comes to a climax at Grande Portage, the *entrepôt* to the rich *Pays d'en Haut*, beyond Lake Superior's western end.

JUST BEFORE THE DAWN★ *By Raymond S. Harris*
"It is darkest Just before the Dawn," the proverb has it. And it is then also that the *Helper* proves most useful. ★An Off-the-Trail Story.

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By Mostall Menn

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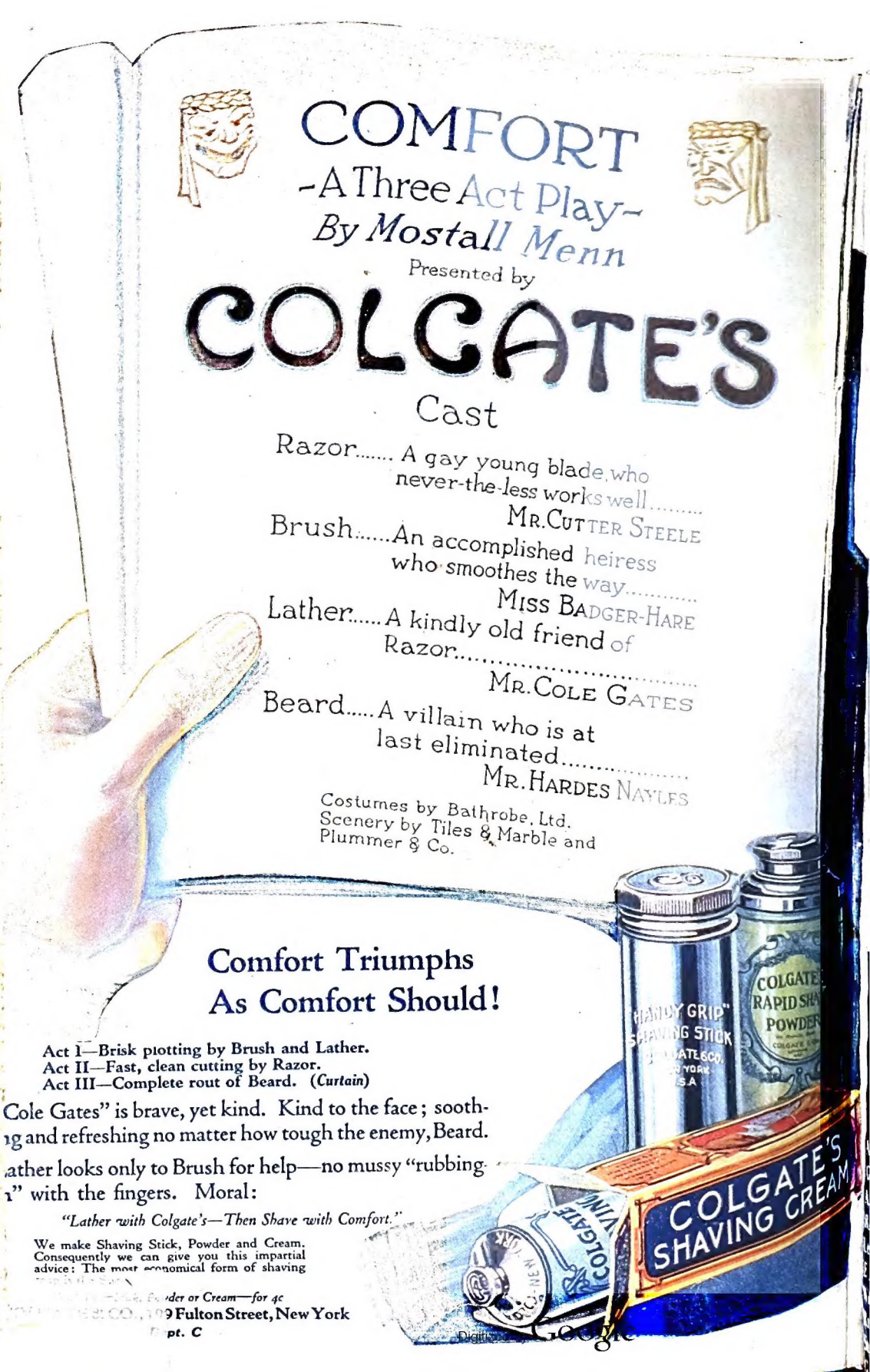
MR. CUTTER STEELE

Brush.....An accomplished heiress who smoothes the way.....
MISS BADGER-HARE

Lather.....A kindly old friend of Razor.....
MR. COLE GATES

Beard.....A villain who is at last eliminated.....
MR. HARDES NAYLES

Costumes by Bathrobe, Ltd.
Scenery by Tiles & Marble and Plummer & Co.



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